

The Influence of Russian Folk Art on Avant-Garde Artists

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In this internship report, I will describe my experience at the Collection of the Russian Museum in Malaga, Spain. It is the first European branch of the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg. The aim of this internship report is to comment on my experience at the Education Department of the museum in question as well as to study several works of the Russian avant-garde artists exhibited at the museum during my internship.

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INTRODUCTION

The Collection of the Russian Museum

«Colección del Museo Ruso» (Collection of the Russian Museum) is the first European branch of the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg. Opened in Malaga, Spain on 25th of March of 2015 it is already a popular museum with more than 107 thousand visitors during the first year.¹ The Spanish branch is managed by «Agencia Pública para la gestión de la Casa Natal de Pablo Ruiz Picasso y otros equipamientos museísticos y culturales» (Public agency for the management of the Casa Natal de Pablo Ruiz Picasso, and other museum and cultural facilities) as well as another museum's branch situated in the same city – Centre Pompidou Málaga. The public agency is chaired by three entities: the mayor of Málaga, Mr. Francisco de la Torre Prados; vice president Mrs. Gemma del Corral Parra and the director is Mr. José María Luna Aguilar.² One of the objectives of the agency is “to plan and manage museum facilities of municipal ownership if they have not their own management or if there is an established contract regime, whose management is attributed to the agency. Equally, it can manage those cultural facilities, which have a special relationship with the museum field. Officially, the Agreement entered into force on December 5, 2014, under the resolution adopted by the Hon. Malaga Plenary Council, in a regular session, held on 27 November 2014.³ The Agreement signed by the State Russian Museum and the public agency is valid for the period of 10 years with the possibility of extension. Were established three annual exhibitions: one with a duration of not less than six months and a number of more than one hundred works; the other two with an approximate duration of six months and a number of thirty and sixty works each exhibition.

¹ *Málaga branch*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 29, 2016, from <http://en.rusmuseum.ru/about/malaga/>

² *Estatutos de la Agencia Pública para la gestión de la Casa Natal de Pablo Ruiz Picasso y otros equipamientos museísticos y culturales*. Título II, Artículo 6, p. 4. (Spanish).

³ *Centre Pompidou Málaga y Colección del Museo Ruso, San Petersburgo / Málaga*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 1, 2016, from [http://fundacionpicasso.malaga.eu/\(Spanish\)](http://fundacionpicasso.malaga.eu/(Spanish)).

The State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia, was the first museum of the Russian art and nowadays it represents the world's largest collection of it.⁴ The museum was founded by Emperor Nicolas II in 1895 to commemorate his father Emperor Alexander III. The collection was formed from the works of art handed over from Hermitage Museum, Gatchina and Alexander Palaces, as well as from the Imperial Academy of Arts and private donations.⁵ The Mikhailovsky Palace was assigned and reconstructed to hold the collection of the new Museum, however, some interiors preserved the lavish imperial design. The museum was officially opened on March 19, 1898. The main exhibition is held in Mikhailovsky Palace (1819-1825), built for the son of Emperor Pavel I, Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich, by architect Carlo Rossi. The XX and XXI centuries art is held in Benois Wing (1914-1919) built by architects L.N. Benois and I.S. Ovsyannikov. Today the State Russian Museum complex contains Mikhailovsky, Stroganov and Marble Palaces, Mikhailovsky Castle and its garden, Summer Garden, Peter I's Summer Palace and his Cabin. After the Revolution of 1917, many artworks from the private collections were nationalized and were sent to the Russian Museum. These days the collection contains over 400 000 works of art from all major periods in the history of Russian art over more than a thousand years: from the X to the XXI century.⁶ The actual director of the museum is Vladimir Gusev (since 1988).

The first occidental branch of the State Russian Museum, the Collection of the Russian Museum in Malaga, is located in the former tobacco factory *La Tabacalera* (the 1920s), which was restored and now represent a huge exhibition center with the perfect conditions for the holding of works of art. The complex consists of exhibition rooms, restoration spaces, several big auditoriums (normally used for conferences and cinema projections) and a recreational space with a cafeteria and a souvenir shop. A *Virtual branch of the Russian Museum* merits attention as well: it is a spacious hall with several computers that have educative programs and information about the collection exposed in Saint Petersburg. The structure of the Spanish branch represents a combination of departments sometimes 'sharing' the same employees with Centre Pompidou Málaga, for example, the Media and Communication Departments. This permits the public agency to facilitate

⁴ *About the State Russian Museum*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 1, 2016, from <http://en.rusmuseum.ru/about/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Málaga branch*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 29, 2016, from <http://en.rusmuseum.ru/about/malaga/>.

the managing of the two foreign branches and to organize joint activities. The departments at the Collection of the Russian Museum are following: Maintenance, Media and Communication, Human Resources, Material and Supply, Restoration and Education. The latter is the one where I had my internship and the one whose functioning I am going to describe below.

According to the Russian laws, a work of art cannot be exhibited outside Russia for a period that exceeds one year.⁷ This is the reason why the Spanish branch must change the ‘permanent’ exhibition every year. The first annual exhibition was called *Russian art of XV—XXth centuries. From icons to XX century* (25 of March of 2015 – 13 of January of 2016) and included about 100 paintings, e.g. works of Karl Briullov, Ilia Repin, Wassily Kandinsky, Mark Chagall, Kazimir Malevich and other famous artists. Since 28 of January of 2016 (and until 29 of January of 2017) the Collection of the Russian Museum exposes the next annual exhibition called *The Four Seasons*. This one introduces the public to the world of northern landscape and includes works of renowned Russian painters, such as Arhip Kuindzi, Isaak Levitan, Alexei Savrasov and others.

Apart from annual exhibitions, there is always a temporary one, which changes every six months. The Malaga branch has already held three of them: *Russian art from the age of Diaghilev* (25 of March – 2 of July of 2015), *Pavel Filonov, Witness of the Unseen* (10 of July of 2015 – 10 of January of 2016), *the Knave of Diamonds* (28 of January – 10 of July of 2016) and the current one is *Marc Chagall and his Russian contemporaries* (20 of July of 2016 – 29 of January of 2017). In the present work, I am going to analyze several works from the second and the third temporary exhibitions, as well as activities dedicated to these exhibitions.

The Knave of Diamonds and Pavel Filonov

In my work, I am going to search for connections between the different representatives of the Russian avant-garde movement and the Russian folklore. My field of study permits me to include such diverse artists as the Knave of Diamonds’ participants and Pavel Filonov, whose works I could see analyze during my

⁷ *Kulturnye Cennosti (Cultural Values)*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 5, 2016, from http://vch.ru/kulturnye_zennosti.html (Russian).

internship. However, were those artists so different and was their interest for Russian folk art occasional? In his Introduction to his *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism* an expert on Russian art history J.E. Bowlt describes the socio-cultural context of the époque mentioning that in the second half of 19th-century Russian academism still imitated the models of the Western masters, based on canons inherent in the art of classical antiquity.⁸ However, Russia's rapid industrialization after 1860 made Russian peasants leave their traditional way of life and move to towns for employment; hence, the peasant himself neglected traditional peasant art.⁹ In response to that situation, parallel with the international Arts and Crafts movement, two Maecenas – Savva Mamontov (1841-1918) and Princess Mariya Tenisheva (1867-1928), in 1870-90s organized Russian art colonies in Abramtsevo and Talashkino estates correspondingly. In art-industrial studios were produced furniture, silks, tiles, etc. in traditional Russian style. The achievements of the both colonies were variations of peasant art contaminated by a mixture of local styles or by elements of *art nouveau*.¹⁰ Moreover, the popularity of Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) and his philosophy provoked the Russian nobles to search for a more primitive style of life, having the peasants as a representative example.

In the early XX century, Russian artists could see the modern trends and movements without leaving their country – in the private collections of Ivan Morozov (1871-1921) and Sergei Shchukin (1854-1937). Morozov had seventeen works by Paul Cézanne (among other artists), while Schukin owned thirty-eight Matisse's and fifty Picasso's works.¹¹ These artists undoubtedly served as inspiration albeit many Russian painters followed the path of rediscovering their own Russian folk art as well. As mentions the curator of the exhibition *the Knave of Diamonds* Evgenia Petrova: "Russian Neoprimitivism, which was related to the worldwide enthusiasm for the art of primitive people, differed by the fact that it referenced not a foreign culture, but its own, one from close by that the artists had known since childhood, but had also been completely forgotten and not at all considered something to imitate up until that point. It was on this wave of combining a love for European Postimpressionism and Russian folk culture that such a phenomenon like

⁸ J.E. Bowlt. Introduction// *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism*. P. 19.

⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹ Jean-Claude Marcadé, "The Russian Cézanneists/Fauvists/ Neo-Primitives of the Knave of Diamonds (1910s) and Western European Fauvists and Expressionists"// *The Knave of Diamonds in the Russian avant-garde*. P. 21.

Knave of Diamonds gained a foothold.”¹² Nevertheless, it is known that they were not the only ones, who studied the folklore of their own country. For example, Gauguin in the period of 1886-90 depicted peasants of Brittany and their religious ceremonies. Probably the difference lays in the importance of artworks created by an artist under the influence of his or her native folklore. In the case of the Russian neoprimitivists, Russian folklore is fundamental for those artists and it is impossible to analyze their artworks without mentioning it. J.E. Bowlt stresses that most of the neoprimitivists came from rural communities and their direct contact with traditional peasant art definitely shaped their theoretical and practical works and provoked them to discover not only the Russian traditional art but also the art of the primitives.¹³

When the situation with the common interest for the folk art is clear, it is still unresolved how Petersburgian Pavel Filonov was related to provincial artists in general and the Knave of Diamonds’ participants in particular. Firstly, Filonov was born in Moscow and he moved to Saint-Petersburg with his sisters at the age of 13, thus that provincial childhood experience should have influenced his later works. At the time Moscow was not just a provincial city, it was a center of avant-garde activity with its youthfulness and the contempt for artistic norms.¹⁴ Secondly, J. E. Bowlt mentioned a strong connection between Filonov and Muscovite artists: “There is no doubt that Filonov’s ‘organic aesthetics’ and his general approaches to form and composition owed a great deal to the Russian Neo-primitivist movement led by David Burliuk, Goncharova, Larionov, Malevich, and Alexandr Shevchenko (1882-1948), and to the parallel academic interest in the decorative arts and crafts of Russia.”¹⁵

Filonov exhibited his works in several exhibitions together with Goncharova, Larionov, and Malevich and that proves that those artists were moving in the same direction. It comes as no surprise as many avant-garde artists were affected by the concern with signboards, popular prints that were called *lubok*, and orthodox icons, seeing in them sources for a more natural art.¹⁶ To summarize, in the present work I am going to study the influence of Russian folk art regarding several works from the

¹² E. Petrova// *The Knave of Diamonds, Towards a History of Russian Avant-Garde*. P. 7.

¹³ J.E. Bowlt. Introduction// *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism*. P.26.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁵ J.E. Bowlt. “Pavel Filonov: An alternative Tradition?”// *Art Journal*. P. 213.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Knave of Diamonds' exhibition (paying special attention to Natalia Goncharova) and from the exhibition *Pavel Filonov, Witness of the Unseen*.

Work at the Education Department

In the second part of this Introduction, I want to recall the practical aspect of my internship, which took place at the Education Department of the museum in question. The Education department organizes guided visits, Saturday workshops, the cinema club and the literature club, among other activities. All these activities imply the acquaintance with some part of the collection. Let us study them separately.

The guided visit is led by one of the trained Museum educators and there are three types of it: visit to the annual exhibition, to the temporary one or a combined visit. Normally, guided visits are provided for visitors to the museum at a certain hour in the evening (regular visits), for schools and social groups, albeit it can be organized for any group of 8-25 persons. Regular visits represent the 'classical' experience, when an educator provides information on work and the artist, cultural contexts as well as cultivates looking skills of visitors, facilitates interpretation and make connections between visitors' lives and the artworks.¹⁷ In addition to the mentioned visits, there is an interesting new practice adopted by Malaga branches of Collection of the Russian Museum and the Centre Pompidou – *visita crono* (chronic visits). Chronic visits represent an analysis of 5-6 paintings with an active participation of the public, 10-minutes each. Thus, the public can decipher the artist's 'language', to study all the details of a painting and to learn more about its author with the guidance of the Education Department representative. One more interesting practice of the Collection of the Russian Museum and the Centre Pompidou Malaga represents special visits dedicated to some topic. For example, during the holding of the Knave of Diamonds' exhibition, there were *Equality visits* intended to reveal art made by women in general and of "Amazons of the Russian Avant-Garde"¹⁸, Goncharova, Rozanova and Ester, in particular.

¹⁷ *Bridging the Theory-Practice divide in Contemporary Art Museum Education*, Melinda M. Mayer, in *Art Education*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Mar., 2005), pp. 13-17 p. 14.

¹⁸ Bowlit, J. E., & Drutt, M., *Amazons of the avant-garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova*. P.13.

During the visit, an educator offers an opportunity to encounter the most interesting works of art in the collection and forms a narrative in the most suitable way for each group. When it comes to groups of students, there are three types of visit, distinguished by students' age: 6-12 years, 13-16 years, 16-18 years. Firstly, during these visits defer an educator's approach to young visitors, as well as paintings that are showed, and a workshop afterward, which is always connected to the annual collection. Thus, here we encounter the constructivist theory of Gorge Hein, which has two essential features: participants should be actively engaged in the learning process and the learned information should be confirmed through visitor's sense-making mechanism¹⁹. All the visits have the same duration of 1,5 hour: 45 minutes for the collection and 45 minutes for a workshop. I am going to describe the each type separately using my own experience with *the Four Seasons* annual exhibition.

The primary school's visit (6-12) was full of small activities to entertain children of a young age. As *the Four Seasons* exhibition starts with winter paintings, children had to enter the exhibition space with their eyes closed trying to imagine winter landscapes, then they opened their eyes and compared imaginative landscapes with the ones from the exhibition. Later, in the *Spring* space, the participants were led to the video projection where they were invited to imitate the movements of the dancers, which in their turn with their movements were imitating the processes happening in Nature during the spring season. After that, children proceeded to the *Summer* halls where they should have laid down, closed their eyes and pretended that they were laying on the grass of a huge green field. Finally, to talk about autumn and the feelings that it arises, children had to touch the floor with one of their hands using another hand to hold their classmate's hand. The produced effect of cold feeling in one hand and warm in another one at the same time made them think about autumn as a transition period for nature and for people, as they could see in the artworks. After the visit there was a workshop, however, sometimes the order of visit-workshop could be changed without any harm for the procedure. Children sat down and got colorful markers and sheets of paper with a printed oval on them. They were asked to think about their favorite season and then draw a self-portrait inside the oval without representing traditional eyes, nose, and mouth, but instead drawing a

¹⁹ Bridging the Theory-Practice divide in Contemporary Art Museum Education, Melinda M. Mayer, in Art Education, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Mar., 2005), pp. 13-17. P. 14.

landscape they associated themselves with. Quite often, the first reaction of the small children was confusion, as they were used to the standard pattern of drawing the self-portrait, but in the end, they were happy with the result.

The secondary school's visit was a bit different. Surveys show that adolescents form a small visitor's percentage of museums²⁰, hence a class field trip is practically the only way to bring them there. It is important to motivate them during the obligatory visit, to show that museums are entertaining and inspiring. As the exhibition of *the Four Seasons* begins with winter video projection, watching it children were invited to guess with what season they were going to start their visit. Entering the *Spring* hall they had to cover their ears and slowly pass by the landscapes and then discuss what sounds they had imagined. Then, in the next season's hall, the representative of the Education Department chose one of the participants to give him or her the role of the guide. That 'guide' had to choose one of the summer landscapes and describe why it merited attention more than other ones. Children were also invited to discuss their favorite landscapes, almost like the primary schoolchildren, however, adolescents had another workshop. The final activity in the *Autumn* hall was the same as the primary school's one. After the visit, adolescents also went to the studio to proceed with the second part of their visit. There hang several reproductions of the collection's paintings that the participants had already seen during the visit. Children were divided into pairs and one had to choose a landscape when another one had to guess which one his partner had chosen asking questions by means of chat-styled messages written on the paperboard. His or her partner had to answer the questions in the same way. The participants were encouraged to use the attributes of a real chat conversation such as emoticons and ideographs. Then children glued their paperboard messages to a big A3 carton and designed it as a smartphone screen. The aim of that workshop was to make museum experience a part of children's everyday life and to show how to talk about some artwork and describe it.

The last age group's visit was often provided to the Baccalaureate students with the specialists' part in Plastic Art, Image and Design or Humanities. Hence, their visit could contain more information about Art History and an educator could use special terminology as well as ask more questions related to the topic. The first

²⁰ Mason, D., & McCarthy, C. 'The feeling of exclusion': Young peoples' perceptions of art galleries// *Museum Management and Curatorship*. Volume 21, Issue 1 (March 2006), Pages 20–31. P.4.

part of the visit was almost the same with the secondary school's one, however it contained less activities, for example participants did not cover their ears, and the emphasis was on interaction of an educator with students. For the workshop's part, participants were divided into three groups: summer, autumn and winter. Each group had extracts from the famous Russian novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* and all the extracts were related to one of the three seasons mentioned above. Each group's participants distributed among themselves those extracts and everyone had to make a collage using clippings from magazines or their own drawings to illustrate an extract. In the end, all the illustrations were gathered together to form a story line. That creative workshop was well accepted by participants as it allowed them to project the museum experience on their work and use their imagination.

Now let us consider activities carried out by the Education Department of the Collection of the Russian Museum. As I have mentioned above, one of the problems of the museums is the lack of interest shown by adolescents. To solve that problem the Education Department of the Collection of the Russian Museum organized several activities intended to attract the young public. One of these activities was *Alternar en la movida* (Alternate on the go) when from 22:00 until midnight participants were creating interpretations of several paintings from the collection using sticky notes. The activity took place at the exposition area and participants were working directly below the paintings they were interpreting. The idea was to discover the museum space at night as well as to create an atmosphere of trust and partnership.

The social center's groups could be of different kinds and therefore they had different visits. During my internship, I carried out visits for elderly people, for refugees, for charity organizations. Elderly people usually visited only the annual or only the temporary exhibition and had no workshop thereafter. The refugees' visit had one peculiarity – some of the visitors did not speak Spanish. However, one of the aims of that visit was to practice Spanish during a leisure activity. Thus, the guide spoke Spanish but should have used simple words and illustrated his or her speech quite clearly using paintings from the collection. The visit for charity organizations probably was the most difficult one. Normally, visits for the charity organizations were followed by a workshop. The visit that I carried out once was for an organization that helped people with the Down syndrome. That time we started with a workshop: the participants with a help of voluntaries had to wrap their hands using

the plastic paper and then using the duct tape and colored scotch tape. After that, they removed the produced mass and, in the end, they had a plastic copy of their own hands. Later the participants went to the Knave of Diamonds exposition and during a short visit that consisted of 4-5 paintings they analyzed the idea of hands of an artist, hands that create. The difference between produced plastic hands helped to see the difference between each artist's style and the creativity of every person.

The cinema and the literature clubs help to see the collection through the prism of two other arts. The two clubs acquaint participants with films or books correspondingly, which should be related to the collection, but not necessarily the author should be Russian director or writer. To give an example, I will describe the procedure of the literature club's sessions. A book and an author that are to be discussed are always revealed beforehand to give an opportunity to read it until the next session. Firstly, the participants discuss (during 30-45 minutes) a chosen book under the guidance of the Education Department representative, who should prepare a plan and a list of topics for discussion. Then participants proceed to the exhibition hall where an educator shows them 5-6 paintings that seem to be related to the book and describes the reasons why he or she chose those artworks. The cinema club has more or less the same procedure with the only difference – the participants watch the film together at the cinema hall located at the museum. The two clubs not only elucidate the works of art in the collection, but also acquaint the participants with literature and film masterpieces.

During my internship, I was lucky to assist an interesting process of the collections' change, when an old annual and a temporary collections were sent back to Saint-Petersburg and new collections came to Malaga in return. Once more, I would like to mention the great work of the Education Department's team, who decided to make special activities and visits during that two-week period of the interchange. The guided visits were free of charge and were destined to a public that was interested in the work of restorers, curators and other professionals, who were normally 'hidden' from the visitors' eyes. Those visits were especially interesting as an interchange includes two museums with almost 4500 km separating them. During the visit, participants learned about the long journey and about conservation of artworks. Moreover, they could see the restorers working, as well as examples of real Condition Reports. Visitors saw individual packages of several paintings and photos illustrating the process of changing of the exposition. An activity, which was

designed in addition to those visits, offered its participants to think about the placement of the new artworks. Each participant had small paper copies of the most important works from the collections and two big maps – of the annual exhibition space and the temporary exhibition's one. Thus, participants had to place the paintings considering their style, époque, and topic. Those visits and activities were intended to show the difficult process of preparing an exhibition and to draw attention to the new ones.

Saturday activity, *Sábados en Familia* (Family Saturdays), is destined for the children with one or two adult attendants and consist of short guided visit to the annual or temporary collection and a creative workshop afterwards. It always has a main topic that serves as a bond between the visit and the workshop. Trying to encourage the community of Russian immigrants, each month the Education department organizes one repeated Saturday activity in Russian language. As I have mentioned above, unlike the school visit, during Family Saturdays' visit an educator can use the works of art either from the annual or from the temporary exhibition that gives him or her more freedom in organizing the subsequent workshop. A family visit to a museum creates a special combination of social and cultural contexts that corresponds the theory of J. Falk and L. Dierking about the Contextual Model of Learning²¹. Indeed, an educator's approach should be twofold: it is important to interest children and their parents at the same time. Moreover, an educator can use the social context to make a family experience more noticeable, emphasizing the bond between children and their attendants. The fact that each child has at least one attendant creates a special atmosphere of confidence. The age of young participants should be from 5 to 12 and it compels an educator to use special language and make the visit very entertaining, for example, employing modern technologies such as tablets and computers. As *Family Saturdays* allowed the usage of a temporary collection, I am going to analyze several visits to *the Knave of Diamonds*' and Pavel Filonov's collections and subsequent workshops.

The first activity I am going to describe is an experimental game with glasses. The aim of the activity was to view the collection through glasses with different filters. Sunglasses that we use in summer served as a reference for participants because through them we see the world in a different way. Firstly, during the

²¹ Melinda M. Mayer. *Bridging the Theory-Practice divide in Contemporary Art Museum Education*. In *Art Education*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Mar., 2005), pp. 13-17. P. 15.

workshop children and their attendants cut their own glasses out of carton. During the visit to the temporary collection, they compared an effect provoked by filters with the paintings that interpreted artists' visions of the world. The visit consisted of Fauvism-influenced self-portrait of Malevich (1910-11), Jean Pougny's *Composition with a Harmonica* (1914), which has a wooden element, Cubo-Futurist *Ceramic Vase and Glass Vessels* (1910s) of Olga Rozanova, and outrageous *Self-portrait and Portrait of Pyotr Konchalovsky* (fig.1, 1910) and finally *Parasols. Beach* of Aristarkh Lentulov (the 1910s) – a landscape that looks like if it was observed through an unfocused camera.

Apart from the workshop that aimed to show its participants avant-garde innovations of the Knave of Diamonds, the Education department carried out two activities intended to study the connection between the avant-garde and traditional Russian art – an aspect that interest me the most in the present work. Both activities were related to handicraft colorful metal trays whose style is known as *Zhostovo painting*. Those trays were an important fount of inspiration for the artists of the Knave of Diamonds. An indisputable advantage of the temporary exhibition is that it held some original artisanal handicrafts, including two metal trays from the second half of the 19th century. During the visit with an educator, participants of both activities acquainted themselves with those trays as well as with several still-life paintings whose integral part was an image of a tray. The first activity was rather simple and consisted of making a three-dimensional still life and a tray, using paper. Another workshop's idea was to play with the concepts of still-life and of portrait like the famous Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527 – 1593). Participants were using images of different fruits and vegetables to make their own self-portraits. In general, all activities related with the Knave of Diamonds allowed participants to show their imagination and creative skills.

The *Family Saturdays* reflecting the works of Pavel Filonov were quite rare, apparently because of a certain difficulty of understanding. Sometimes his works were used together with ones from the annual collection. However, those activities that were based only on Pavel Filonov's works were well received. I am going to analyze one of them. The activity's title was “¿Ahora me ves?” (Do you see me now?) and the general idea was to find ‘hidden’ or mimetic objects in the paintings of Filonov. During the visit were used: *Peasant Family* (fig.7, 1914), *Formula of Spring* (1920), *Universal Shift in the Flowering of the World via the Russian*

Revolution (1922), *Wolf Cub* (1930), *Countenances* (1940). The exposition of Pavel Filonov's works was organized not only in chronological order but also according to 'abstractness' scale. Hence, it started with his figurative portraits (for example, *Portrait of Eudokiya Glebova* of 1915) and ended with his more abstract works. A *Peasant Family*, which I am going to analyze below, was somewhere in the middle between figurative and abstract paintings of Filonov. Thus, participants had to find objects that were not explicitly visible. Unlike the human figures and animal figures of dog/wolf, hen and cock, a horse's body is melding with the abstract background. Besides, in the upper part of the painting, there is a bird, which also mimics flowers and plants that surround the family in the center. Then the task was getting more difficult since participants had to find traces of figures in abstract works. The visit ended with one of the last paintings of Filonov, *Countenances*, where they had to count how many faces they could see. However, there was no right answer showing how the appreciation of art is subjective. During the workshop's part of the activity, participants were invited to create a collage from three Filonov's paintings using a principle of the lattice. This time, using clippings of Filonov paintings, participants were creating their own abstract work.

In the end of this Introduction, I would like to consider intercultural aspect, which is very important in the work of the Education Department of the museum in question. During all the activities and guided visits educators paid a lot of attention to the Russian culture and, probably, it would have been impossible not to do that in a museum with a narrow focus on Russian art. It was very interesting to ask its visitors what associations with Russia they had; normally, the answers were "snow", "cold", "red color". On the one hand, educators used those associations to make the process of introduction into the foreign culture easier and, on the other hand, to show that Russia is much more than those stereotypic ideas. However, the emphasis on the Spanish culture is not less important. Analyzing the selection of artworks sent from the State Russian museum, one could notice that many paintings were related to Spain in one way or another. Those artworks show museum's visitors that their interest in Russian culture corresponds the interest in Spanish culture of Russian artists. In general, the opening of the Spanish branch of the State Russian museum provoked bi-directional cultural enrichment; for example, as mentioned the director

José Maria Luna, Pavel Filonov's exhibition was considered by several media as the most important one in Malaga in the summer of 2015.²²

Summarizing my experience at the Collection of the Russian Museum, in general, and the Education Department, in particular, I consider this experience very beneficial and useful. This young museum has a big collection of artworks that constantly changes. Moreover, the Collection organizes many interesting educational activities for all sorts of visitors. The Education Department representatives follow international tendencies in art museum education and strive to apply in practice the best methods that they encounter. I would highly recommend this experience for seekers of an internship in the field of Art History or Museum Studies.

²² Los españoles muestran su interés por la cultura rusa (Spanish people show their interest in the Russian culture). (n.d.). Retrieved September 1, 2016, from <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/cultura/201606101060628787-espana-rusia-cultura/> (Spanish).

CHAPTER I

PRIMITIVISM VS. NEO-PRIMITIVISM

In the first chapter of the present work, I want to write about Russian Primitivism: how it appeared, established itself, evolved and, finally, how it became Neo-Primitivism. I consider that to tell the history of the Russian Primitivism we should start with the history of the exhibition society the Knave of Diamonds, which I have mentioned in the Introduction part, as well as with a brief historical background.

The story of the Knave of Diamonds begins in September of 1910 when Konchalovsky(1876 –1956) and Mashkov(1881–1944) met another important member of the group – Aristarkh Lentulov(1882 - 1943). The latter remembered that he had proposed to create a group of artists, which would promote the new French art, i.e. Gauguin, Matisse, Van Gogh and “the great” Cézanne.²³ The Knave of Diamonds was founded as an exhibition society in the same year by Lentulov, Konchalovsky and Mashkov together with Mikhail Larionov (1881 –1964), Natalia Goncharova (1881 – 1962), Robert Falk (1886 - 1958), Alexander V. Kuprin (1880 - 1960), Alexander Osmerkin (1892 –1953), and even Kazimir Malevich (1878 – 1935). The provocative name “the Knave of Diamonds” can be interpreted in several ways. An art historian, who organized several Larionov’s exhibitions, Gleb Pospelov, mentions that Larionov claimed that Italian Renaissance cards had depicted the knave of diamonds with a palette, therefore the knave of diamonds symbolized the artist; however this was merely another of Larionov's typical japes: Renaissance playing cards did not even possess a knave of diamonds.²⁴ The yellow diamond was a symbol that Russian prisoners wore on their uniform, hence the brand of social outcasts. In general, group members explained that Diamonds meant passion and the knave meant young blood²⁵ – exactly what needed the Russian art of that period being submerged in the world of the academic painting. However, the

²³ *Ruskiy Avangard (Russian Avant-garde)*. P. 252.

²⁴ G. Pospelov. “On Knaves of Hearts and Diamonds”// *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* (Special issue, 2005). P.24.

²⁵ *Ruskiy Avangard (Russian Avant-garde)*. P. 253.

main purpose of such a strange title probably was the will to draw public's attention to expositions.

At the end of 1910, the exhibition society the Knave of Diamonds was established and beginning with their first exhibition in Moscow every year more and more Primitivism-influenced artworks had been produced. It is important to mention that the Knave of Diamonds was completely a Muscovite phenomena, not only because the group's exhibitions were held in Moscow, but also because artist from Saint Petersburg were invited to participate too late and thus couldn't send their paintings to the first exhibition.²⁶ In this sense, the Knave of Diamonds and its exhibitions was something provincial, something different from European Saint Petersburg, thus something that was more Russian. Moscow of those days was a special place; in a way it was a cradle for the Russian bourgeoisie. James L. West, one of the authors of the *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*, wrote: "No period in Russian history is richer in precedents and analogies for the emergent civil society and free-market economy than that of the turn of the century, when Moscow of the Silver Age became for one historical moment the architectural and cultural expression of the emergent bourgeoisie".²⁷ The new muscovite merchants were seeking for a un-Russian look, one that distinguished them from the common people, emulating their Western colleagues and trying to supplant traditional elites.²⁸ The Knave of Diamonds was ridiculing that preference of everything Western to Russian, wealth prior to spiritual growth, as well as emerging popular culture.

A.Krusanov – the author of the *Ruskiy Avangard* (Russian Avant-garde), mentions that artists at exhibitions of the Knave of Diamonds could be divided into three groups: 1) Cézannists (Lentulov, Konchalovsky, Mashkov); 2) Neo-primitivists (Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich); 3) Russian expressionists, influenced by German artists.²⁹ The term *Neo-primitivism* did not exist at the time, thus by that allocation of the artists A.Krusanov probably meant the future group the Donkey's Tail, created by Goncharova and Larionov after their separation from the Knave of Diamonds in 1912, and its manifest called *Neoprimitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements* (1913) written by Alexander Shevchenko (1883— 1948) – one more

²⁶ *Ruskiy Avangard (Russian Avant-garde)*. P. 254.

²⁷ *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*. P. 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁹ *Ruskiy Avangard (Russian Avant-garde)*. P.254.

artist displayed at the exhibition. I want to mention that G. Pospelov considered the term *neo-primitivism* to be unnecessary: he states that only Shevchenko used that term, while others used just *primitivism* without *neo* prefix, and that Shevchenko only wanted to distinguish their art from primitive art of *lubok*'s and shop signs' painters.³⁰ *Lubok* is primitive woodblock prints usually with a script derived from popular tales or religious literature, that were a part of the Russian peasant art. *Lubok* woodcuts appeared in Russia in the XVIIth century, borrowing a lot from the Old Russian manuscripts and printed books as well as influenced by Old Russian icons and decorative art – by the colors, ornamental designs, floral motifs, and compositional resolution.³¹

But why Muscovite artists became interested in Russian folklore and the modern French painters at the same time? Probably because of the general enthusiasm of educated circles in relation to those topics. As I have mentioned in the Introduction part, in 1870-90s two Maecenases – S. Mamontov and Princess M. Tenisheva, organized art colonies where artists could examine local folklore art forms. Concerning Western influence, in 1906 Larionov went to Paris and there he could see the big Gauguin retrospective. In addition to all these factors, in Moscow at that time there were two collections of modern French painting of I. Morozov and S. Shchukin that I have already mentioned. Apropos, Mamontov, Morozov, and Shchukin also belonged to the new Russian bourgeoisie, so we cannot deny its positive influence considering the artistic world.

The exhibitions were always scandalous and well attended. One of the most outrageous paintings was *Self-Portrait and Portrait of Pyotr Konchalovsky* of Ilia Mashkov (fig.1), exposed at the first exhibition of 1910. Furthermore, we can consider this painting some sort of a manifest of the Knave of Diamonds. Mashkov and Konchalovsky are represented almost nude, showing their athletic-type bodies. Eugenia Petrova mentions that their poses and appearance remind us the photographs of boxers and wrestlers of the time.³² Nevertheless, two artists are surrounded by the things that show us their education and intelligence: several books (two of them have on them the names of Cézanne and Matisse), a piano, a violin and music notes. However, there are two still-life paintings on the wall behind artists as one more

³⁰ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov* (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s). P. 9.

³¹ Summary // *Russian Woodcuts 17-18 centuries*.

³² Ibid.

symbol of their interest in middle-class popular culture. As observe Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, modernists, by embracing what the middle class marked as 'low', present a mirror image of the repression by celebrating symptoms of bourgeois phobia³³. *Self-Portrait and Portrait of Pyotr Konchalovsky* is a kind of an advertisement for the new phenomenon "The Knave of Diamonds."³⁴

The Russian world of art was not ready for such a dramatic shift towards modernity. However, the Knave of Diamonds' participants were not scared of it, transforming their exhibitions into some kind of scandalous performances. As mentions Jean-Claude Marcadé: "Working outside the bounds of canons, in a seemingly inept style, their direct perception acquired a tense and expressive rhythm, closer to a gesture or oral intonation."³⁵

One of the canvases displayed at the first exhibition of the Knave of Diamonds, was Ilya Mashkov's *Still life with a pineapple* (1908, fig.2). Observing that work we can get a feeling that Cézanne-styled fruits dance some kind of magic roundelay around an exotic pineapple, recognizing its superiority in dimensions as well as in originality. It is important that this painting is rather big – 121 x 171 cm. It looks impressing: painted fruits are bigger than their real analogs. The oval shape of the canvas and of the frame parallel with an oval, which form these fruits, and an oval shape of the white plate as well. Those ovals resemble circles on the water when somebody throws a pebble inside. In our case, 'pebble' is the pineapple. According to Meyer Shapiro, the represented objects chosen for a still-life acquire meanings from their analogies and relations to humans: "...the still-life with musical instruments refers to the musician; the table with fruit and wine recalls the dinner or banquet; the books and papers are the still-life of the writer, the student or scholar and may find their place in his portrait."³⁶ A pineapple referred to a specific social class – the bourgeois. In fact, Mashkov, as well as other members of the Knave of Diamonds, wanted to play with Russian bourgeoisie and its tastes. Mashkov also had a special predilection for pineapples and he used it not only in his still-lives: a

³³ Antliff, Mark and Leighton, Patricia. "Primitive" // *Critical terms for Art History*. P. 182.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jean-Claude Marcadé, "The Russian Cézanneists/Fauvists/ Neo-Primitives of the Knave of Diamonds (1910s) and Western European Fauvists and Expressionists" // *The Knave of Diamonds in the Russian avant-garde*. P. 22.

³⁶ Shapiro M. "The Apples of Cezanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-life" // *Modern Art, 19th and 20th centuries, selected papers*. P. 23.

pineapple is the only fruit depicted in the famous *Self-Portrait and Portrait of Pyotr Konchalovsky*. It seems that for Mashkov a pineapple was a symbol of everything exotic and philistine at the same time, as for several centuries in Russian Empire this fruit was a symbol of wealth and nobility. However, another artist highly prized by the Knave of Diamonds' participants had several still-lives with pineapples – it was Matisse. Mashkov's pineapple could be also a tribute to the great artist.

Shapiro said: "...in still-life there is a great span of choice; many different temperaments [...] discover in it their unique responding things."³⁷ Having analyzed still-lives of the Knave of Diamonds' participants, we can see that the metal tray was the most frequently painted object (especially for Konchalovsky). In the *Still life with a pineapple*, the mark in form of a tray is a symbol of the Russian folk art as the pineapple is a symbol of middle-class bourgeois culture. A tray normally was used not only as a household utensil but also as an interior decoration. It could be found in shops, hotels, restaurants, etc., as well as at home. The frame in the form of a tray is very important in this still life. If we imagine the same picture with a usual rectangular frame, the position of fruits will seem unnatural and odd, when with this oval tray we do not question ourselves why these fruits are dancing around the pineapple, the tray conveys them its shape. This tray unites the still life, makes it a coherent work of art. Thereby, the tray is as important as the pineapple in the middle of it, they form a balanced still life. Round-shaped objects, as well as pyramidal ones, were quite typical for shop signs of the beginning of the XXth century. A shop owner in that way was trying to attract a customer and to advertise goods on sale – with a colorful, brilliant and eye-catching tray. Returning to Shapiro, he also pointed out that in still life there might have been connotations arising from the combined objects, which were made more visible through the artistic conception; the painter's habitual selection came in time to stand for the artist and was recognizably his.³⁸ Mashkov's selection of the composition is all about this playfulness and irony of the Knave of Diamonds. Mashkov doesn't simply invent a primitive design for those traditional Russian trays, but he mixes the tray with a Cézanne-styled still life. In fact, we can see a table, probably with some green cloth on it, and a background wall – all these elements are quite odd for the Russian tray painting. The depiction of the ordinary white plate opposed to the exotic pineapple is also remarkable – a perfect

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

example of the Knave of Diamonds' antitheses. G. Pospelov mentions in his monography that the similarity between the Knave of Diamonds' members and Cézanne lays in characteristics of depicted objects: post-Cézanne movement had a commitment to the still-life painting or *nature morte*, which was found in Russian primitive art on street signs and on trays.³⁹ Unfortunately, critics saw in that special interest in still life a banal immobility of objects, hence a facilitation in their depiction.⁴⁰

The artistic liberty permitted Mashkov and Konchalovsky to theatricalize even such a thing as a fruit. Everything is fake, like in some provincial Russian fairground theater. As mentions G. Pospelov, it is necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, the Knave of Diamonds' interest in the samples of folklore in the visual arts: provincial signs, *lubok* paintings, trays, etc., and their fascination with some kind of theatrical urban folklore: fairs, festivals, carnivals, that is with the world of folklore as a whole, on the other hand.⁴¹ The mark clearly has a tray's form – but it is not a real tray with real fruits on it – it is some kind of theatrical props to use on stage (that is at the exhibition). The represented fruits are actors, the pineapple is the main character and the painter is the scriptwriter as well as the director of the play.

The painter Paul Sérusier once said: "Of an apple by an ordinary artist, people say, 'I feel like eating it'. Of an apple by Cézanne they say, 'How beautiful!' You would not peel his apple; you would like to copy it".⁴² One can see clearly the work of a brush and layered brushstrokes on Mashkov's painting. Indeed, The Knave of Diamonds' participants also took from Cézanne his gradual laying of brushstrokes, the open process of facture's construction, revealing before our eyes, which equates different subjects in their unique plastic quality.⁴³ They only started to reveal the facture aspect of painting in their art and a decade later Russian constructivists continued their labor. Moreover, the *Still life with a pineapple* was made 4 years before the famous Pablo Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912) and probably we can consider it to be its forerunner in this avant-garde searching for a different representation.

³⁹ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P. 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴¹ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P. 23.

⁴² *Hidden Treasures Revealed*, exh. cat., State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, 1995, p. 196.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

In the “Notes of a Painter” of Matisse, he writes that the role of the artist consists of seizing current truths often repeated to him, but which will take on new meaning for him and which he will make his own when he has grasped their deepest significance.⁴⁴ We can see that for Russian artists from the Knave of Diamonds the “current truths” were laying in the French art tradition, represented mostly by Cézanne, and in the world of Russian folklore, which added that special significance to their canvases. The Knave of Diamonds (including Larionov and Goncharova) as non-conformists of Russian art were playing with social taste always provoking the public to question the bounds of what was considered ‘beautiful’ and ‘interesting’ in art.

In 1912 the ‘Eastern’ wing of the Knave of Diamonds, foremost Goncharova, Larionov and Malevich, left the group. The strong Cézanne and Matisse line advocated by Mashkov, Konchalovsky and other members of the group didn’t suit those artists weary with the constant accusation of plagiarism. However, they were still a part of European primitivist movement, which advocated rupture with Western civilization in order to ‘return’ to societies in an earlier stage of development. In general, primitivism offered to all the artists an escape route from the stultification of French culture and academic art.⁴⁵ Goncharova and Larionov accused the ‘Western’ wing of failure to conceive the *soul* of an object, of lack of spiritual energy.⁴⁶

In 1912 Larionov and Goncharova together with Kazimir Malevich (the exhibition has some of his works), Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953) and Alexander Shevchenko, created a new group Donkey’s Tail. Nevertheless, these artists still showed their works at some exhibitions of the Knave of Diamonds. The following year, Shevchenko wrote the “Neoprimitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements” that became the only declaration of the Neoprimitivist movement. Introducing the new term, Shevchenko mentions that Neoprimitivism testifies the point of departure and, on the other hand, with the prefix *neo* reminds of its involvement in the painterly traditions of their age. However, he considers neo-primitivism to be a national phenomenon because of the Russian link with the East, especially after the Tatar invasions; he underscores Russian spirit to be more

⁴⁴ Matisse. “Notes of a Painter” // *Art in theory*. P. 74.

⁴⁵ Anliff, Mark and Leighton, Patricia. “Primitive” // *Critical terms for Art History*. P. 182.

⁴⁶ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P.142.

distinctive and more temperamental in comparison with the Western civilization.⁴⁷ Moreover, Shevchenko offers a model of art rotation – from the East, from the Caucasus to Byzantium, then to Italy and thence, adopting oil-painting and easel-painting techniques the art came back to Russia.⁴⁸ The “products of the West” seemed to him deteriorated and rotted after such a long, roundabout journey. He emphasizes the ‘barbarity’ of the Eastern culture, but considering Russia to be more Asia than Europe, he mentions that they are proud of it. This statement explains clearly, why the members of the Donkey’s Tail left the westernized Knave of Diamonds. They found sources of inspiration in primitive art forms including naïve paintings and children’s drawings but especially in the Russian domestic arts and crafts – in bright colors, emphatic lines, intense stylization and general optimism.⁴⁹ Shevchenko emphasizes the striving to find new paths for their art, however, without rejecting the old ones completely – above all using the art of the old East.

As an important source of inspiration, Shevchenko mentions *lubok* images. In 1913 Larionov organized “Vystavka ikonopisnykh podlinnikov i lubkov” (Exhibition of Original Icon Paintings and Lubki) with copies from his own collection. In the foreword for this exhibition he explained what exactly interested him and other *lubki* admirers in xylography: “The *lubok* is varied: *lubki* printed from copper or wood plates, hand-colored or stencil, color circumscribed by the outline or bleeding over the edges, which in fact is not the result of chance but is a fully intentional and established tradition, confirmed by the fact that even today the Old Believers continue to colour their *lubki* in this way. Because collectors of *lubki* admire this technique, there are not just dozens of them but hundreds of thousands of them.”⁵⁰ In other words, *lubki* were a source of “running color” – color passing beyond the contour of an object, however not in a chaotic way but in the form of a color’s iridescence⁵¹. It was especially interesting for Larionov, that later created a theory of *rayonism*, based on those principles. When we talk about woodblock prints that influenced modern painters, one more important artist was clearly inspired by those – Van Gogh. Van Gogh was fascinated by bright colors of Japanese *ukiyo-e* images

⁴⁷ A. Shevchenko., *Neoprimitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements*// *Art in theory*. P. 47-48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁹ Bowlit, J. E. “Neo-Primitivism and Russian Painting”, p. 134.

⁵⁰ Foreword, “Exhibition of Original Icon Paintings and Lubki”, 1913. M. Larionov// *InCoRM Journal*, Vol. 4 Spring-Autumn, 2013. Translated from the Russian by Anthony Parton.

⁵¹ A. Shevchenko. “Neoprimitivism: its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements”// *Art in theory, 1900-2000: An anthology of changing ideas*. P. 52.

exactly as Russian primitivists were fascinated by Russian *lubki*. Both *ukiyo-e* and *lubki* appeared in XVIIth century, were accessible for public and depicted popular stories, theatrical episodes, entertaining pictures (as well as ‘indecent’ ones).

Returning back to the “Neoprimitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements” as the manifest for neoprimitivists in general, it reflected bases on which their theory stood, i.e.:

1. Clear and well-balanced drawing, expressed in delineation and silhouette.
2. Good form, meaning composition’s harmony of drawing and the distribution of reliefs in accordance with the weight of individual parts.
3. The concrete hence not naturalistic depiction.
4. An artist should create objects not by simple copying but by the sensation of their forms and colors.
5. To display the essence of objects an artist can depict their intermediate forms. Moreover, simplifying the form he or she should complicate its conception – objects have not one, but several no less characteristic forms.⁵²

The last point probably refers more to another eclectic style – Cubo-Futurism, created in 1912-1913 from the Cubism and Italian Futurism by the same Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich and other artists, many of those having their paintings exhibited in the Knave of Diamonds and later the Donkey’s Tail exhibitions. Later Malevich mentioned the importance of the primitive Russian art in his *Autobiography* with regard to the elaboration of their own styles: “In 1912 Larionov organized[...]the Donkey’s Tail exhibition to which each member contributed no less than sixty canvases, primarily from the everyday round of peasants. [...]The circle of our own art began with antiquity, continued through the icon, and ended up with peasant art and even contemporary peasants. Western art, of course, exerted a deep influence on the Donkey’s Tail as well, but Cézanneism, along with the first stages of Cubism, was merely a method for expressing the spiritual world of peasants”.⁵³

⁵² Ibid., p. 50.

⁵³ K. Malevich. Extracts from *Autobiography* (1933)// *The Knave of Diamonds, Towards a History of Russian Avant-Garde*. P.12.

One of the most representative artworks of the Neoprimitivist style is *Autumn Yellow (Happy)* (fig. 3, 1912) painted by Mikhail Larionov. Larionov was inspired by urban primitive culture that usually was depreciated by educated groups and, especially, by academic art. In the beginning of XX century, Russia was undergoing the rapid technological progress, therefore the migration of country folk, who wanted to work at fabrics etc., was especially active resulting in Revolution of 1917. Nevertheless, those ‘urban peasants’ created their own popular culture which also served as a source of inspiration for Larionov. He was particularly interested in scenes from lives of provincial dandies, soldiers, and streetwalkers.⁵⁴ In *Autumn Yellow* we can see an infantile portrait of a woman that could be inspired by some wall painting executed by one of those social outcasts.

It is important that Larionov inserted the painted title “Autumn Happy” at the bottom of his work, approaching it to the real provincial graffiti. Moreover, the word “happy” is written with a spelling mistake. N. Zlidneva in her monograph *Izobrajenie i Slovo v Ritorike Russkoi Kul'tury XX veka* (Image and Word in the Rhetoric of Russian Culture of XX century) mentions that avant-garde adopted the word in its broadest sense, i.e. the graphic image of writing, and that poetics of the avant-garde match the poetics of the Baroque and canonical arts (folk and primitive icon), which are focused on the rhetoric.⁵⁵ Larionov adopted the style of *lubok* images, which always contained some explanation of a picture or a story.

In his works Larionov probably wanted to get the same effect of freedom and sincerity that Roger Fry prescribed to children when they drew the mental images that had made up their imagination.⁵⁶ There is a clear distortion of proportions, the flat primitive manner of representing the face and emphasis on vivid color – characteristics of some childish picture. Matisse in his “Notes of a Painter”, mentioned above, says: “I will not try to remember what colours suit this season, I will be inspired only by the sensation that the season arouses in me”; describing autumn he mentions that it “may be soft and warm like a continuation of summer, or quite cool with a cold sky and lemon-yellow trees that give a chilly impression and already announce winter”.⁵⁷ Did Larionov read those notes and decided to fill up the

⁵⁴ Bowlit, J. E. “Neo-Primitivism and Russian Painting”. P. 138.

⁵⁵ *Izobrajenie i Slovo v Ritorike Russkoi Kul'tury XX veka* (Image and Word in the Rhetoric of Russian Culture of XX century). P.18.

⁵⁶ R. Fry “An Essay in Aesthetics” // *Art in theory*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Matisse. “Notes of a Painter” // *Art in theory*. P. 73.

canvas with that golden yellow? The same year he paints another *Autumn* (1912), as a part of his primitive, *lubok*-style series “Seasons” – that time the painting had a cool blue background with a white figure of Autumn. Maybe Larionov even represented both of Matisse’s sensations about autumn, mixing them with traditional Russian *lubok* prints. Moreover, in the same series, *Spring* (1912) represents a yellow canvas with the yellow Spring, white and red letters – very similar to the *Autumn Happy*’s style. Larionov is like an African artist, who is trying to find a comprehensible form for an incomprehensible idea, a personificated abstract concept.⁵⁸ However, we do not need to study African art in our case, as the Slavic paganism also had animist worldview and Russian folklore has many traces of pagan times. Larionov saw the creativity of savage artists and children that seemed to him even more profound and intense than the creativity of modern French artists. As many other paintings of Larionov of that period *Autumn Yellow* represents a revolutionary process – a shift of visual priorities where the painting is, above all, an exercise in color and line and not a photographic scene to be interpreted.⁵⁹

In fact, all the world’s avant-garde artists found it problematic to make the public appreciate their innovative colors and forms. August Endell in his article “The Beauty of Form and Decorative Art” wrote that appreciation of visual form was something that must have been acquired by culture and education, thus barbarian could not understand it, and that we could see the formal beauty in a detailed way: in the form of the root of a tree, in the way in which a leaf is connected to a stalk, in the structure of the bark.⁶⁰ The Knave of Diamonds’ participants saw a special beauty of forms in the Russian traditional art – in the metal trays, wooden carved figures and spinning wheels, in muscovite orthodox churches, as well as in urban culture – in street signs with pyramids constructed from breads, in corpulent Russian women and skinny gypsies, in provincial theater and traditional ornaments. They saw the beauty of vivid colors in provincial architecture, peasants’ clothes, fair decorations, icons and painted trays. They saw the beauty where others could not see it, probably because they passed by those objects in daily routine. Russian avant-garde artists had a particular interest in the Primitive art: they did not want to imitate it, but the style itself became an object of portrayal.⁶¹ Jean-Claude Marcadé also mentions the

⁵⁸ A. Macke. “Masks”// *Art in theory*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ Bowlit, J. E. “Neo-Primitivism and Russian Painting”. P. 137.

⁶⁰ A. Endell. “The Beauty of Form and Decorative Art”// *Art in theory*. Pp. 59-60.

⁶¹ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P. 25.

specificity of the Russian primitivists: “Unlike the French, who integrated the data of African or Polynesian art in the Cézanneist structure, they did not include elements of primitive art in the new concepts of the picture surface. The Russians did the opposite, introducing the formal discoveries of Post-Impressionism into the basic structure of primitivism.”⁶²

John E. Bowlt considers the importance of Neo-primitivism to the evolution of the Russian art to be two-fold: on one hand, it inspired artists to look on primitive artifacts with different eye, hence to preserve Russia’s heritage, and to think in terms of the painting itself rather than in terms of its relevance to reality, on the other hand.⁶³

⁶² Jean-Claude Marcadé, “The Russian Cézanneists/Fauvists/ Neo-Primitives of the Knave of Diamonds (1910s) and Western European Fauvists and Expressionists”// *The Knave of Diamonds in the Russian avant-garde*. P. 22.

⁶³ Bowlt, J. E. “Neo-Primitivism and Russian Painting”. P. 140.

CHAPTER II

NATALIA GONCHAROVA AND RUSSIAN FOLK ART

In the article “Creative women, creative men, and paradigms of creativity: why have there been great women artists?”, E. Dyogot argues that in opposition to the French Surrealism, which was one of the most tolerant twentieth-century movements in relation to the female artists, within the Russian avant-garde men welcomed their women colleagues as allies and equals: women even wrote and published theoretical texts and that was some kind of taboo at the time.⁶⁴ Natalia Goncharova is probably the most vivid example of that statement.

Goncharova was born in 1881 in a village in Tula province; she spent her childhood there. She had begun her career as a frail sculpture student at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. However, this experience certainly influenced her paintings. At the age of nineteen, she met Mikhail Larionov and he helped Goncharova to discover that her genuine vocation was painting as well as became her lifelong friend and partner.⁶⁵ In 1906 she contributed to Sergei Diaghilev's (1872-1929) *L'exposition de l'Art Russe* at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. Four years later, she already had her one-day one-woman show at the Free Aesthetics Society, where she was accused of pornography because of the nude models. That exhibition clearly showed that within just a few years, she had mastered Symbolism and Impressionism, had adopted contemporary Western art and turned to her advantage all that she had learned; by 1910 Goncharova had leaped to the forefront of the avant-garde.⁶⁶ In 1912 she contributed to the *Der blaue Reiter* exhibition in Munich and the second Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition in London. The same year Goncharova left the Knave's group together with Larionov and dedicated herself to what interested her the most – to the study of Russian folk art and creation of Neo-Primitivism. Two years later, Goncharova traveled to Paris together with Larionov to design sets and costumes for *Le Coq d'or*. From that

⁶⁴ E. Dyogot. “Creative women, creative men, and paradigms of creativity: why have there been great women artists?” // *Amazons of the Russian Avant-Garde*. P. 109.

⁶⁵ *The Knave of Diamonds in the Russian avant-garde*. P. 320.

⁶⁶ A. Parton. *Goncharova: The art and design of Natalia Goncharova*. P. 54.

moment, a collaboration with Diaghilev became the main labor activity for Goncharova. In the revolutionary year of 1917, she and Larionov accompanied Ballets Russes in Spain and Italy and then settled in Paris. Comparing with the Russian period, in France neither Goncharova nor Larionov achieved artistic success. However, in 1961 in London was organized a big retrospective on Goncharova and Larionov; and when one year later, at the age of 81, she passed away, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris organized a big exhibition in her memory.

Natalia Goncharova for sure was the most scandalous member of the Knave of Diamonds and later of the Donkey's Tail. Were her works that indecent or it was just the fact that she was a woman? Probably both reasons are valid. However, 2015 year estimate, she is one of the top-5 most expensive women artist on auction.⁶⁷ Together with Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova's art mirrors the entire history of avant-garde art from Impressionism to Primitivism and straight to the beginning of non-objective art.⁶⁸

The exhibition of the Knave of Diamonds held one of the most typical works for Natalia Goncharova – *Peasant Women* of 1910 (fig.4). Indeed, the rural life and the peasant Russia with its constant cycle of manual labor and festivals was the main topic of her art.⁶⁹ When Larionov was drawn to urban folklore, Goncharova was attracted by the traditional art of peasants. For her, the nature of folk creativity was in “impersonal might, monumentality, and sacral profundity”.⁷⁰ We can see all listed above in *Peasant Women*: the monumental posture of the figures, as if they were carved out of stone, the empty look dwelled on their working massive hands. That reminds us of some ancient ritual that could consist of predefined actions: washing the clothing and rinsing the rice. Their features resemble Goncharova's *Self-Portrait with Yellow Lilies* (1907), where she probably compares herself with rough peasants, her vocation of a painter with their labor of heavy manual work. Seems that she considered art to be the same daily labor that required all the time and devotion. Goncharova's family photographs show that she liked to dress like a peasant woman when she was at her family estate in Tula province. It seems that her origins and traditions of her homeland were of the great importance for the artist.

⁶⁷ Palmer, L. “Top 10 Most Expensive Women Artists at Auction 2015”. (n.d.). Retrieved August 29, 2016. From <https://news.artnet.com/market/most-expensive-women-artists-327329>.

⁶⁸ *Natalia Goncharova: The Russian years*. P.9.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

We can compare two peasant women from the painting with exotic Polynesian women of Gauguin. In *Peasant Women* we can see the bright colors of Gauguin's paintings, the same interest to mythology. Goncharova transforms Russian peasants into an exotic race forgotten in the modern civilization of factories with its machine labor. In general, as mentioned G. Pospelov in his article "Early Goncharova and Gauguin": "If we apply the most general classification of European art trends, both Goncharova and Larionov belonged with Gauguin's version of Post-impressionism rather than Cezanne's".⁷¹ Once again, we return to the difference between the Knave of Diamond's participants and why the original group's members had fallen apart. When Mashkov and Konchalovsky were using artificial fruits for their still-lives to leave no trace of life inside those objects, Goncharova was depicting real women as ancient stone statues still full of inner energy and force. However, Pospelov noted a certain difference as well: unlike Gauguin's weightless people that appear suspended between beams of light, peasant women of Goncharova have their feet firmly planted on the ground.⁷²

The female figures from *Peasant Women* have their faces of the same clay color as the earth they are standing on. We can perfectly imagine that people could be made of clay if we remember some old folktales. The skin of the woman from the foreground ever reflects the aquamarine water like some plain surface. Her legs have the same rough lines as the stones beneath them as if they were 'growing' out of it. We should remember that Goncharova firstly was studying sculpture and that experience manifests itself on almost all of her paintings. The artist applies a stylized approach to both peasant women and the landscape: the latter is reduced to schematic geometrical shapes and the women are treated in an angular manner, giving them a statuesque presence in the landscape.⁷³ Nevertheless, these colors and the type of terrain are more peculiar to Polynesia, rather than to Russia. With years the influence of Gauguin was becoming less noticeable in Goncharova's artworks, but in *Peasant women* we still can see some traces of the master's style. Of course, the topic of the painting also reminds us of Gauguin's series of paintings depicting the peasants from Arles.

⁷¹ G. Pospelov. "Early Goncharova and Gauguin" // The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ A. Parton. *Goncharova: The art and design of Natalia Goncharova*. P. 42.

In the 1910s Goncharova was interested in the “Eastern myth”. Everywhere in the Europe the East was considered to be an essence of the ‘primitive’ culture and in this sense Russian artists were going the same way with their Western colleagues, but this fascination with the Eastern culture was of particular importance: artist were searching for a basis for the Russian identity.⁷⁴ Goncharova’s homeland, which always has had territorial and mental division between East and West, once was a home for the Scythians – Iranian Eurasian nomads. Goncharova had a special passion for the Eastern culture opposing it to the Western civilization together with her colleagues from the Donkey’s Tail. An important part of the archaic art of Scythians were stone sculptures known as *kamennye baby* (‘stone women’) that were placed over the kurgans, often representing women. In that way, her peasants from *Peasant women* are more like steppe nomads, having sharp and expressive plastics.⁷⁵ Goncharova considered Scythian art more important than modern movements. For example, she said that Cubism was fine; however, the Scythian stone steles and Russian painted wooden dolls were also executed in a Cubist manner.⁷⁶

Talking about *Peasant Women*, we should take into consideration the facture (*factura*) of the painting as well. *Peasant Women*’s making reveals clear dabs sometimes rather wide ones, especially in the landscape. Small details, leaves for example, seem to be painted with just one brush stroke. Facture was a characteristic that interested not only Goncharova but all the Knave of Diamonds’ members as I have mentioned in the first chapter of my work. Here we encounter once more an influence of the Western artists, which young Goncharova studied visiting the private collections of Ivan Morozov and Sergei Schukin.

A. Parton mentions a socio-political idea that could be behind Goncharova’s peasants: she relocates them in a landscape that is rightfully theirs viewing them as being capable and industrious.⁷⁷ It contrasts with the art of many other Russian painters that usually depicted rarefied middle-class landowners of those days. Bare-foot, with brown faces, hands, and legs, peasant women are associated with the land. The rough-hewn figures show us their nobility and grandeur and Goncharova appears

⁷⁴ Bubnovy Valet: *Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov* (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s). P. 25.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Pis’mo N.Goncharovoi” (The letter of N. Goncharova), *Protiv techeniya*, 3 (16) March 1912. P.3.

⁷⁷ A.Parton. *Goncharova: The art and design of Natalia Goncharova*. P. 44.

to be a successor in a line traced back through Van Gogh and Gauguin to Millet and Courbet.⁷⁸

The German expressionist Emil Nolde in his article “On Primitive Art” observes, talking about the primitive people: “They aspire to express delight in form and the love of creating it. Absolute originality, the intense and often grotesque expression of power and life in very simple forms – that may be why we like these works of native art.”⁷⁹ I find these words applicable to Goncharova’s interest to the primitive art. Being, at first, a student at the department of sculpture at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, for sure she shared this love for creating a form. Examining her works, we can notice that almost all of them are executed in a stiff manner as if she wanted to carve them using colors instead of sculptor’s tools. The connection between the German expressionists and the art of Goncharova and Larionov was quite strong. Pospelov pointed out that it reveals itself in their attraction to the inner expressive nature of the subject and, in the case of Goncharova, she aspires to spiritualize the “forces of the earth and clay”, that is why her characters look like effigies made of clay.⁸⁰ This characteristic corresponds the second Goncharova’s artwork that I am going to analyze.

It is impossible to imagine the history of Russian art without icons – a sacred representation of the Christ or a Saint usually painted on a wooden panel. The tradition of painting icons came from the Byzantine Empire when in the X century the prince Vladimir the Great baptized Kievan Rus’ (federation of East Slavic tribes) previously choosing Orthodox Church for Christianization. Icons are considered the first painted art works in Russia. All the generations of Russian artists had mentioned the importance of iconographic tradition, but in the beginning of XX century, it became especially significant; in 1913 the Institute of Archaeology in Moscow drew public’s attention to icons organizing a large exhibition. As the result, even during following soviet ‘iconoclastic’ period we can see traces of icon pastiche.

Turning back to Natalia Goncharova, she executed her polyptych *The Evangelists* (fig. 5), outstripping other artists, in 1911. During that year, she painted a

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.43.

⁷⁹ Emil Nolde “On Primitive Art” // *Art in theory*. P.97.

⁸⁰ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P. 25.

large number of religious works inspired by icons. These paintings demonstrate that Goncharova appreciated the artistic qualities of the Russian fresco and icon tradition well before Matisse's visit to Moscow in 1911, during which he mentioned that icons were an important source for the contemporary expressionist.⁸¹ It is interesting that once, a theatrical designer Valentina Khodasevich said about Goncharova that there was a certain austerity about her, like in icons.⁸²

The Evangelists was meant to be exhibited at the first exposition of the Donkey's Tail, however, a censor removed it from the show with such a scandalous name because of the religious theme of the polyptych. When later the same work was exhibited in 1914 at Goncharova's second one-woman show in St. Petersburg, following an unfavorable review of some critic, where he calls the four figures "some monstrosities", the police arrested all her paintings on religious subjects at the exhibition.⁸³ Thus, the sincere interest of the artist in the Russian religious art was considered a blasphemy for quite a long period. However, a quite grim painting *The Evangelist* probably would have been viewed in another way if critics had known what tragic events were going to happen with Russian Empire during the period of 1914-1917.

The polyptych could have been inspired by small provincial churches with their interior decoration executed by local masters without special artistic formation. The names of the pieces are associated with colors of garbs of each of the Evangelists: *Evangelist in Blue*, *Evangelist in Red*, *Evangelist in Grey* and *Evangelist in Green*. Evangelists are Mark, Matthew, Luke and young John – the authors of the four Gospels. However, Goncharova does not mention their names but emphasizes the painterly characteristic of each canvas. In addition, it is easier to imagine that those are not four Saints but four *muzhik's* (peasant men) disguised as Evangelists for a provincial theater's performance and that returns us to the original Knave of Diamond's aesthetic principles.

The enormous figures, occupying all the space on the canvases, have particular gestures, reflecting religious meanings. The Evangelist in blue indicates his trust in intelligence raising his huge finger to his forehead; the Evangelist in gray

⁸¹ A. Raev. Religioznoe (pod)soznanie russkih hudozhnic i ih zritelei. V poiskah fenomena russkoi hudozhnici (Religious (sub)consciousness of Russian paintresses and their spectators. Searching for the origins of the phenomena of a Russian paintress)// Amazonki avangarda (Amazones of the Avant-Garde). P. 74.

⁸² Natalia Goncharova: *The Russian years*. P. 9.

⁸³ Ibid., p.14.

pointing upwards calls on the Lord God; the Evangelist in green confirms the veracity of the Word, pointing to the scroll; finally, the Evangelist in red has a gesture of grief or tenderness.⁸⁴ The expressive way of representing the religious topic and the huge size of a polyptych strikes with awe when you see it. The particular color of each Evangelist reminds us of stained-glass windows in churches and cathedrals, however, the background of each piece is dark, arousing apocalyptic thought. A spectator is assisting a work of the primitive thought, confused by primordial questions, he feels its primeval and savage force.⁸⁵ The faces with huge eyes look like masks and once again we are encountering the influence of the provincial theater, that could be on some religious topic as well.

In 1913 Aleksandr Shevchenko in “Neoprimitivism: its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements” mentions that we encounter the ‘flowing color’(v.s. chapter *Primitivism vs Neo-primitivism*) for the first time in Russian icons as a quite definite painterly principle, and that it is expressed in the highlighting of the garments by colors passing on into the background.⁸⁶ We can see the same effect on the *lubok* woodblocks. However, two years before the Shevchenko’s manifest, Goncharova surpassed the traditional principle: as we can see on Evangelist in Blue and Evangelist in Green colors ‘flow on’ into the faces and hands of the figures as well. If we analyze what brings together the four figures of the polyptych, we can see the white of their scrolls, the ochre of their skin and, of course, whitespaces that were used in traditional iconography to add volume to the figures. However, the figures seem to be rather flat, nearly trapped into the space of the canvases, despite the huge dimensions of those. Goncharova adopts this attraction to the flatness not only from the traditional iconography but also from her ‘teachers’: Van Gogh and Gauguin, as well as the clear and revealed laying of brushstrokes.⁸⁷

Goncharova once said that Cézanne and icons had equal value, however, her paintings, created under the influence of Cézanne, and other ones, created under the influence of icons, did not have equal value at all.⁸⁸ In that way, she once more

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P. 25.

⁸⁶ A. Shevchenko. “Neoprimitivism: its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements”// *Art in theory, 1900-2000: An anthology of changing ideas*. P. 51.

⁸⁷ *Bubnovy Valet: Primitiv i Gorodskoi Folklor v Moskovskoi Zhivopisi 1910-kh Godov (The Knave of Diamonds: Urban Folklore and the Primitive in Moscow Painting of the 1910s)*. P. 25.

⁸⁸ Nikolai Khardzhiev: “In memory of Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) and Michail Larionov (1881-1964)”// *Iskusstvo knigi*, Moscow, 1963-1964, vol. 5, reissue, pp. 307-308.

explained the difference between her art and the art of the “Western” wing of the Knave of Diamonds. Ada Raev in her article “Religioznoe (pod)soznanie russkikh hudozhnic i ih zritelei. V poiskah fenomena russkoi hudozhnici” (Religious (sub)consciousness of Russian paintresses and their spectators. Searching for the origins of the phenomena of a Russian paintress) mentions that Goncharova in her writings left no doubts that her cultural origins lay in the peasant world of the Russian province, which is impossible outside the religious context; she also points out that Goncharova required a law that would have prohibited the export of Russian icons abroad.⁸⁹ It seems that icons for Goncharova were the most important basis of the Russian art. Goncharova was striving to work in a field that traditionally was male’s and probably that was one more reason why her canvases were considered so scandalous and blasphemous. Traditionally only men could paint icons, so when Goncharova offered to paint a church almost gratuitously, her offer was rejected.⁹⁰

The Evangelists is approximated to the orthodox Deesis of iconostasis by consisting of four rectangular parts. However, it is only one of the many monumental works of Goncharova: she executed several polyptychs, for example, later in the 20th, she painted the *Spanish women*. On the one hand, for her, it was a compliance with a Russian artistic tradition, but on the other hand, her close friend in emigration and a famous Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva explained that Goncharova’s room in Paris was too small and she had to divide her monumental works into several parts for that reason.⁹¹ *The Evangelists* was painted two years before the big *Exhibition of Old Russian Art*, the one I have mentioned above, which opened to the public the world of icons with its vibrant colors, unique energetic and extraordinary compositions. An art critic and poet M. Voloshin wrote a significant article “What do icons teach?” about that exhibition where he stated: “For the moment, in any case, ancient Russian art is revealed to our eyes in all its fullness and all its splendor just as in the same manner the ancient world revealed itself to the men of the Renaissance. Today this art seems so bright, so modern, it proposes such obvious and immediate solutions to the problems of modern art that not only does it allow but it requires us to consider it

⁸⁹ A. Raev. “Religioznoe (pod)soznanie russkikh hudozhnic i ih zritelei. V poiskah istokov fenomena russkoy hudozhnici” (Religious (sub)consciousness of Russian paintresses and their spectators. Searching for the origins of the phenomena of a Russian paintress// *Amazonki avangarda (Amazones of the Avant-Garde)* P. 62.

⁹⁰ A.N. In’shakov. “Natalia Goncharova sredi hudijnikov Oslingo Hvosta” (Natalia Goncharova among the painters of the Donkey’s Tail)// *Amazonki avangarda (Amazones of the Avant-Garde)* P. 147.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 146.

not just from the archaeological point of view but also from an aesthetic one”.⁹² As we can see, Goncharova did not need to see treated and restored icons to feel their importance, to find them as a source of inspiration – for her it had been obvious.

Talking about Goncharova’s art, we should not forget about the importance of the same *lubki*. When Larionov organized in 1913 an “Exhibition of Original Icon Paintings and Lubki” there were icons as well, as we can see from the title. Those icons were executed by artisan painters and, in this sense, had similar nature with the Russian *lubki*. Probably here is the greatest difference between Larionov and Goncharova: when the former was interested more in entertaining *lubki*, Goncharova was an admirer of serious Orthodox icons. Nevertheless, those pieces belonged to the same artisanal category – probably, that was why Goncharova and Larionov were working side by side.

In 1913, in Goncharova’s retrospective her biographer I. Zdanevich defined her style as “Everythingism”, that meant the principle of positive and uncritical acceptance, opposing the criticism of Western Modernism.⁹³ Probably that was the best characteristic for Goncharova’s artworks, as we could see in examples mentioned above. Indeed, she united Russian folklore art with the art of the Orient and nomad tribes and with modern French tradition, specifically Gauguin. That Goncharova’s retrospective and Zdanevich’s lecture perhaps were the apogee of the ‘golden’ period of Goncharova’s creative work – as mentions Evgenia Petrova: “Unfair as it may seem in the light of her subsequent long life and prolific career, Natalia Goncharova had by 1914 achieved all that she was destined to contribute to twentieth-century painting.”⁹⁴

⁹² M. Voloshin. “What do icons teach?”// *InCoRM Journal*, Vol. 4 Spring-Autumn, 2013. Translated from the French by Patricia Railing. P.1.

⁹³ E. Dyogot. “Creative women, creative men, and paradigms of creativity: why have there been great women artists?”// *Amazons of the Russian Avant-Garde*. P. 114.

⁹⁴ *Natalia Goncharova: The Russian years*. P. 16.

CHAPTER III

PAVEL FILONOV'S UNIVERSAL FLOWERING AND ARTISANAL ART

Pavel Filónov was born in Moscow January 8th of 1883 in a petty bourgeois family. His father died in 1887 and Filonov's big family lived in poverty. For that reason, he had to start working at a very young age helping his sisters to do the embroidering and from the age of six dancing in some small Moscow theaters. When their mother died in 1896, Filonov and his sisters moved to Saint Petersburg. The close ties between them supported Filonov during all his life and probably gave that happy mood to all his artworks on the family topic.

In Saint Petersburg, he studied decoration at the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts and attended evening drawing classes at the same institution. Together with other students, Filonov worked at the estate of Princess Oldenburg in Ramon, where he could gain an interest in peasant lifestyle. After graduation Filonov was working as a painter/decorator and attended classes of academician Lev Dmitriev-Kavkazski, at the time a famous illustrator, to get enrolled into the Imperial Academy of Arts. However, during the period of 1903-1908, he tried to enter the Academy three times and never succeeded. J.E. Bowlt mentions that under Dmitriev-Kavkazsky's guidance, Filonov developed an interest in anatomical line and form.⁹⁵ Finally, in 1908 he was enrolled as an external student. In 1905-1910 Filonov was traveling a lot, mostly by boat or by foot. He visited Kazan, Caucasus, and even Jerusalem his traveling resulting in more or less 100 sketches.⁹⁶

On February 16th of 1910 was established a new artistic society *Soyuz Molodyozhi* (Union of the Youth) where Filonov was among the most notable members. As we can see, that group appeared almost simultaneously with the Knave of Diamonds. They even developed an artistic collaboration and some of the Union's exhibitions held works of Knave of Diamonds' participants, for example, Larionov's and Goncharova's. In March of the same year, Filonov exposed his work at the first exhibition of the Union and several months afterward he was expelled from the

⁹⁵ Bowlt, J. E. *Russian art, 1875-1975: A collection of essays*. P. 140.

⁹⁶ Pavel Filonov: Real'nost' i Mify (Pavel Filonov: Reality and Myths). P. 610.

Academy for corrupting other students.⁹⁷ In the end, he was rehabilitated, but Filonov already had another view on art and he left the Academy at his own will shortly thereafter.

After his leave from the Academy, he went to Helsinki with several Union's members. Their aim was to organize a collaborative exhibition of their artistic society together with Scandinavian avant-garde artists but it did not happen.⁹⁸ In 1911 he participated in several Union's exhibitions. Returning to connections between Filonov and Muscovite artists, as I have mentioned above, Larionov and Goncharova also participated in the first Union's exhibition as well as he participated in the Donkey's Tail's exhibition in 1912. A writer Vasily Yan (Yanchevetsky) wrote an article criticizing the First Union's Exhibition in general and works of Larionov in particular. However, Yan mentioned that Filonov was talented and unique and that his paintings had a beautiful and harmonious line and strange oriental fantasticality. The writer ends his article saying that Filonov and other two group members were the positive side of the artistic society.⁹⁹ After the second Union's exhibition Filonov received a less pleasant commentary. An art critic Nikolay Breshko-Breshkovsky wrote about one Filonov's painting that it was a precious psychiatric document, probably suggesting that its author was insane. The critic finds Filonov's style to be a morgue created by a feverish fantasy, however, he saw in the same painting traces of a pure and subtle fine art and anatomical precision.¹⁰⁰

During the summer of 1912 Filonov sets off on a trip once more. He visited Italy and France where in Lion he worked at a stained glass studio and, eventually, visited Louvre. The same year he formulates the principles of his art in the article "Kanon i Zakon" (The Canon and the Law). The last Union's exhibition in 1913-1914 held 10 Filonov's works. In those works a critic Vladimir Denisov saw diligence that demonstrated Filonov working 12-15 hours a day and also a connection between art of Filonov and works of Leonardo Da Vinci¹⁰¹ (however, as mentions J.E.Bowlit, unfortunately, these connections with Da Vinci as well as with Bosch, Michelangelo, among others, remain speculative as the artist rarely

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 611.

⁹⁹ V.Yanchevetsky. Hudozhestvennaya hronica (Art chronicle)// Rossiya. 1910, 12th of March. № 1321. P.3.

¹⁰⁰ N. Breshko-Breshkovsky. Iskusstvo i hudozhniki. Vistavka "Soyuz Molodyozhi" (Art and painters. Exhibition of the "Union of Youth")// Birzhevie vedomosti. 1911, 13th of April. № 12267. P.6.

¹⁰¹ V. Denisov. "Soyuz Molodyozhi" ("Union of Youth")// Den'. 1913, 19th of November, № 308. P.3.

mentioned any influences or sources¹⁰²). At the same time with the exhibition, the Union organized the first Futurist Theater where Filonov executed costumes and decorations for the tragedy *Vladimir Mayakovsky* (with the poet himself having the leading role in that staging). J.E. Bowlt writes that it was at that time when Filonov's work betrayed an expressionist idea of superimposition of psychic and emotional experience in the physical world, his works reminding us of Munch or Nolde.¹⁰³ Filonov became close with the Futurist circles and he illustrated a book of another famous poet – *Rikaushiy Parnas* (Roaring Parnas) of David Burlyuk (1882-1967). Those illustrations were declared pornographic and the *Roaring Parnas* was prohibited by censorship. Later the same year Filonov organized a studio *Sdelannye kartiny* (Made Paintings) and published a manifest with the same name where he formulated the main principles of his art. In 1915 Filonov publishes his poem *Propeven' o Pro-rosli Mirovoi* (Song of Universal Growth) with his own illustrations. Having several works published in the urge to explain his philosophy, Filonov almost never participated in any debates or performances. During the pre-revolutionary years, he eschewed public manifestations, in contrast to Larionov and his allies.¹⁰⁴

During the period of 1916-1918 Filonov had to serve in the army on the Romanian frontline, however, he became one of the revolutionary leaders – he was elected chairman of the military executive Committee of Danube region and then Filonov went back to Saint Petersburg, with its name already changed to Petrograd. After the war and the revolution Filonov's mythology changes as his theoretical ideas about the new world and new people seem to become a reality. Consequently, proletariat became his fundamental mythologem.¹⁰⁵

The year of 1919 was quite important for Filonov and for all the artist of Petrograd. That year was organized the First Open State Exhibition of Artworks in the halls of the former Winter Palace, which had become the Palace of Arts, where participated almost 300 artists that exposed approximately 1800 works (however, it did not hold any paintings of Muscovite painters). Filonov exposed a cycle of works under the title *Vvod v Mirovoi Rascvet* (*Introduction to the Universal Flowering*).

¹⁰² J.E.Bowl. *Full of Beauty and Suffering, Pavel Filonov*//the Tretyakov Gallery. 4, 2006, p.44.

¹⁰³ Bowlt, J. E. *Russian art, 1875-1975: A collection of essays*. P.141.

¹⁰⁴ Lidymla Pravoverova. "Pavel Filonov: Don Quixote of the Russian Avant-Garde"// *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

Two of his paintings were purchased for the Country Fund.¹⁰⁶ In general, he was well-accepted, for example, an art critic Leon Pumpiansky called him one of the greatest young Russian painters.¹⁰⁷ J.E. Bowlt points out that “the eschatological concepts of ‘universal flowering’ and man’s regeneration essential to the philosophical basis of Filonov’s art were, of course, shared by many artists and intellectuals of the time, not least Malevich – although, Filonov’s peculiarly biological and physiological interpretation of the imminent cosmic transformation of the organic and inorganic worlds was alien to the mystical ‘fourth dimension’ of Malevich’s suprematism...”¹⁰⁸

In 1922 work of Filonov *Entry into Universal Flowering* (1919-20) was exposed at the Erste Russische Kunstausstellung (First Russian Art Exhibition) in the Van Diemen Gallery in Berlin together with Malevich, Chagall, Tatlin et al. During several months in 1923, Filonov was the head of Ideology Department of GINCHUK (State Institute of artistic Culture), where also worked Malevich and Tatlin, among others; however, soon he was replaced by Nikolay Punin. Later the same year, Filonov publishes the *Declaration of Universal Flowering*. In 1925 Filonov gave classes at the Academy of Arts, as the result, his disciples formed an artistic group Masters of Analytical Art. The attraction of Filonov’s analytical ideas, as stresses J.E.Bowl, laid in its consistence while the Theory was a composite one with its essential ideas owing to various trends in Russian art.¹⁰⁹ However, one year later, Filonov and his students were banished from the Academy, and from then starts a story of persecution, unfortunately, typical for avant-garde maitres.

In the end of 1930 the State Russian Museum organized a big exhibition of Filonov’s works, however, it was not destined to be exposed to the public. Everything was prepared: a printed catalog and hung paintings, but the administration organized a special public viewing. Even though the majority had considered the exhibition admissible, it was not inaugurated. Probably because of the persecution and the ‘bad’ reputation, the majority of disciples left Filonov. No matter what, Filonov continued giving classes. He led an ascetic lifestyle and earned money mostly by doing decorative works as he took no fees from his students and refused to

¹⁰⁶ Pavel Filonov: Real`nost` i Mify (Pavel Filonov: Reality and Myths). P. 612.

¹⁰⁷ K zakritiu vistavki v Dvorce Iskusstv (Concerning the closing of the exhibition in the Palace of Arts)// Zhizn’ Iskusstva. 1921. 15 of November. №817. P.5.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁰⁹ Bowl, J. E. *Russian art, 1875-1975: A collection of essays*. P. 143.

sell his paintings to avoid separating them and hence losing his artistic legacy.¹¹⁰ He repeatedly refused to receive a pension. Filonov together with his disciples illustrated Finnish and Karelian epic poem *The Kalevala*, executed some restoration works in the Saint Isaak's cathedral and even painted a portrait of Stalin (1936). Nevertheless, Filonov lived in constant need and under pressure of persecution. In 1935 his favorite disciple, Vasily Kuptsov, suicided himself expecting an arrest.¹¹¹ Three years later, in 1938, Filonov's stepsons were repressed, causing illness of his wife Ekaterina Serebryakova. Bowlt mentions that from 1934 until 1941 Filonov's works were not exposed at any official exhibition and he was subjected to violent attacks in the press.¹¹² In 1941, during the Siege of Leningrad, he was on duty, as many Leningraders did, dousing the missiles. Filonov caught pneumonia and died on 3rd of December 1941.

Thinking about Filonov's connection to the Russian folk art we should remember his professional formation. It is important that he received an artisan education and, probably, embroideries that he executed as a child to gain some money influenced the floral decoration of many Filonov's works. Filonov studied the traditional Russian symbology and later he created special symbols for his works. Like Goncharova, he saw a prophetic importance of Russian folk art for the 'new' international art. He mentioned it in his manifesto "the Made Paintings", locating the artistic center of gravity on his homeland that had created marvelous cathedrals, artisan art and icons; and below in the text he encouraged artists to make paintings and drawings that would equal with their extraordinary effort to the stone cathedrals of South-East, West of Russia.¹¹³

In regard to the influence on Filonov's art, J.E. Bowlt writes that Filonov's interest for primitivism increased when he met Valdemar Matveis (1877-1914) at the Union of Youth – one of the first Russian art historians who studied the art of Africa, China, and other exotic places; the importance of Goncharova's and Larionov's was also quite significant.¹¹⁴ Filonov's attitude towards working process was also similar

¹¹⁰ Natalia Apchinskaya. "Pavel Filonov. Artist of the World Blooming and World Suffering."// *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P.28.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 614.

¹¹² Bowlt, J. E. *Russian art, 1875-1975: A collection of essays*. P. 147.

¹¹³ *Zayavlenie intimnoi masterskoy zhivopiscev i risovalschikov 'Sdelannye kartiny'* (a statement of the intimate studio of painters and draughtsmen 'Made Paintings')// Filonov: *hudojnik, issledovatel', uchitel'* (Filonov: a painter, an investigator, a teacher). P.85.

¹¹⁴ J.E. Bowlt: "Pavel Filonov and Russian Modernism"// *Pavel Filonov: A hero and his fate*; abridged version published in Russian as "Pavel Filonov i Russkiy Modernism". P.10.

to an artisan artist's one. In his first manifesto "The Canon and the Law" the artist compares inspired paintings with ones that required poor, merely human and weary work, writing that if work defeated the inspiration it would mean the triumph of a human being.¹¹⁵ Thus, Filonov elevates the diligence over the inspiration, and, perhaps, the hard work over the innovations of the new art. Talking about the new art, Filonov was sometimes reproached as if he had concealed the influence on him of Picasso's works. Indeed, when we see Filonov's works, it seems that he uses the cubist manner a lot. However, his approach to the painting was quite different comparing with Picasso and other Cubists. Filonov tried to explain in the same manifesto "The Canon and the Law" that if somebody wanted to find any connections between his theory and other artistic movements, they should have searched for it in centuries of Art history. Filonov claimed that he had never seen Picasso's works; however, he knew about his art and considered the principle of geometrization insufficient to convey the essence and to show the organic life of a painting.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Filonov believed that another leader of the avant-garde could share his ideas. Indeed, during a period of time, Malevich was Filonov's ally; as I have mentioned above, they worked together at the GINCHUK (State Institute of artistic Culture). However, Malevich in search for his own style, rephrasing a proverb, was an ally to everybody and an ally to nobody. He wrote about Filonov's ideas that if the latter wanted to be 'the world flowerisher', then what kind of flower it would be, if the same offset, the same shift, the same space appearance remained?¹¹⁷ Thus, Malevich did not see a revolutionary change in Filonov's art, a change that he was searching for.

In Filonov's "Declaration of Universal Flowering" (1923) he formulated the main idea of his art and why it was different from the other theories of the time. He claimed that he knew and felt that every object did not have only two predicates, the form, and the color, but a whole world of visible and invisible phenomena, its emanations, reactions, actions, genesis, existence, known or secret qualities that, in their turn sometimes, had innumerable predicates; hence, he rejected the doctrine of the contemporary realism of 'two predicates'.¹¹⁸ Even though the paintings I am

¹¹⁵ "Kanon i zakon" (The Canon and the Law)// Filonov: *hudojnik, issledovatel', uchitel'* (Filonov: a painter, an investigator, a teacher). P.81.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.83.

¹¹⁷ Malevich to Matiushin. 1915// *Organica: Bespredmetniy Mir Prirody v Russkov Avangarde XX veka*. Moscow., 2000, p. 105.

¹¹⁸ *Deklaracia Mirovogo Rascveta* (Declaration of Universal Flowering)// Filonov: *hudojnik, issledovatel', uchitel'* (Filonov: a painter, an investigator, a teacher). P. 88.

going to analyze were executed almost ten years before this declaration, they still belong to the cycle *Introduction to the Universal Flowering* that he exposed in 1919 in the Winter Palace. Those paintings marked his ascend towards the *Universal Flowering*, towards remarkable Analytical Abstraction of his later years. Indeed, the folk art played its role in that process.

The first painting of Filonov that I am going to study in the context of Russian folklore's influence is *the Peasant Family* (fig.6). Sometimes this work is referred to as *the Holy Family*. Indeed, on this painting we can see a popular religious theme: a man and a young woman, who is holding a baby, normally represent Saint Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and the Child Jesus. Filonov later represented a Holy Family once more in his primitivist *Escape from the Egypt* (1918). The family is surrounded by animals: a horse, a bird, a rooster, a hen and a dog/wolf. They are in a beautiful colorful garden that can be interpreted as the Garden of Eden. The peasant origins of Saint Joseph are especially emphasized, however, he is depicted in the canonic pose of "awaiting" that signifies reverence before the Divine mystery.¹¹⁹ The Virgin still has soft features and the child is painted in an apparent primitive manner with quite an unnatural gesture. Nevertheless, Natalia Apchinskaya describes the gesture of the child as traditional for the folk art, signifying "an embracing of the world while gathering it toward himself [...] an embodiment of hope and a concentration of mystical light".¹²⁰

We can relate the double title of the painting to Filonov's biography. He was raised as an Orthodox Christian and even made two religious pilgrimages in 1905-1907 to New Athos (Abkhazia) and Jerusalem.¹²¹ However, as we know, during the period of revolutions and the I World War his worldview was undergoing strong changes. Thus, the image of the Holy Family remained but it could not be a Christian scene anymore. Derek Maus mentions that the transformation of Biblical heroes turned into Russian peasants proves a sympathy with the revolutionary social thought of the époque and that the sympathy for the peasantry allowed Filonov to use this

¹¹⁹ Natalia Apchinskaya. "Pavel Filonov. Artist of the World Blooming and World Suffering."// *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P. 30.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid., 28.

allegory to glorify a peasant family.¹²² Something that was, probably, typical for the Russian avant-garde can be noticed in this shift: while art was going through a rapid and radical change, the iconography remained the same. Filonov, as well as Malevich, used canonic gestures and poses, Orthodox iconographic principles to depict images of the proletariat. In many Filonov's works, we can find certain parallels with the fresco paintings from the old Russian cathedrals, that Filonov mentioned in his manifesto "Made Paintings". Apropos icons, Filonov even painted an icon of St. Catherine (1908-1910). It follows that he painted the icon after his pilgrimage, thus he probably visited the monastery of St. Catherine and, in general, he was under a strong influence of that religious journey. We can see on the *Peasant Family* that Filonov follows the canon of the Orthodox iconography: faces should have been represented with large eyes, thin lips, and a straight nose; the figures should have looked immobile and devoid of outward expressiveness.¹²³

For Filonov it was important to stress rural origins of this family. Why? We can see the answer on his other paintings. Several Filonov's works contain urban images and those are not the positive ones. Paintings as *Degeneration of an Intellectual* (1914-15), *Those Who Have Nothing to Lose* (1912) and later *Animals* (1925-26) show us the hostile atmosphere of a city, where people are small in comparison with buildings and have harsh animal features. Moreover, animals from the latter painting are very different comparing with the ones from the *Peasant Family*. They have traces of suffering on their faces and look ferocious, no traces of the rural harmony left. City in Filonov's works deforms the human existence and the *Universal Flowering* should be a victory over it.¹²⁴ Once more, we encounter an idealization of rural life, like in works of Goncharova. The village is seen as a source of vitality and purity, in contrast to the city that destroys and oppresses.

In the *Peasant Family*, we see the beginning of human history when people and animals were in harmony.¹²⁵ However, not without reason, describing those animals I wrote "dog/wolf". Researchers have different opinions on this topic, sometimes seeing this animal as a friendly domesticated creature, whose labor is to

¹²² Derek Maus. "Space, Time and Things Made 'Strange': Andrei Belyi, Pavel Filonov and Theory of Forms". P. 94-95.

¹²³ Galina Klokova, an Introduction to the *Russkaia ikonopis'* = Russian icon painting = la peinture d'icônes Russes. P.15.

¹²⁴ Liydmila Pravoverova. "Pavel Filonov: Don Quixote of the Russian Avant-Garde" // *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P. 52.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

protect its owners, while others see it as a wolf snarling at the family, as a symbol of the constant danger to their happiness. As I have mentioned in the Introduction part, the horse's body is composed of the little fragments, like flowers and plants from the background. This horse also differs from other animals by having almost human features; especially we can see that in its eyes. Why did Filonov separate that horse from other animals? In "The Canon and the Law" Filonov wrote that if a horse one day acknowledged a revolution inside of itself that horse would be able to become any form of being on its choice, including a human.¹²⁶ Probably, in Filonov's early manifest, we encounter one more demonstration of the *Universal Flowering* and he showed us that 'revolutionary' process two years later on *the Peasant Family*. One more animal that is emphasized is the rooster. Firstly, it is the only animal that has a pair. Secondly, the rooster was quite important for Slavic mythology. It usually represented the harbinger of the sun and light, it is frequently encountered in folk tales as a redeemer from evil forces. Hence, for Filonov the rooster could symbolize a harbinger of the *Universal Flowering*. Finally, an anecdote proves the importance of that rooster, told by a poet of the Russian Futurism and Filonov's friend Aleksei Kruchenykh (1886-1968). When he visited Filonov in summer of 1914, the latter was working on the *Peasant Family* and the colorful green rooster drew the attention of the poet. The next day the rooster was already blue and three days later it was copper-red – the one that we can see on the final painting.¹²⁷ Once more, we see an example of Filonov's extreme diligence in relation to his art.

Analyzing the floral pattern from the background, Filonov appeals to Rosicrucian symbols where the rose symbolizes the divine light of the Universe.¹²⁸ The rose is present in many Filonov's works, for example in the *Gardener* (1912-1913), the portrait of A.F. Aziber with his son (1915), the *Shrovetide* (1913-14). However, together with the *Peasant Family*, those works belong to the same cycle *Introduction to the World's Florescence* and the symbolic rose corresponds directly to the cycle's title. Returning to the folk art, we can remember already mentioned in this work *Zhostovo* trays, which quite often have roses in their flower compositions. On the other hand, we can relate those roses to another artisan art – embroidery, which Filonov made in his childhood, or to the tapestry. Indeed, the floral

¹²⁶ "Kanon i zakon" (The Canon and the Law)// Filonov: hudozhnik, issledovatel', uchitel' (Filonov: a painter, an investigator, a teacher). P.83.

¹²⁷ A. Kruchenykh. "Nash vihod"// Pavel Filonov: Real'nost' i Mify (Pavel Filonov: Reality and Myths). P.163.

¹²⁸ Liydmila Pravoverova. "Pavel Filonov: Don Quixote of the Russian Avant-Garde"// *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. p. 46.

background is turned into a decorative pattern and resembles a gobelin. Derek Maus expressed an interesting idea, that Filonov's art, especially his more abstract paintings derive from pointillism as he uses small formal elements to create a larger work; however, his 'dots' include images, shapes, areas of texture and body parts.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, I think his art could probably derive from the tapestry principles that he knew since childhood.

In her article "Pavel Filonov: Don Quixote of the Russian Avant-Garde", where she compares the artist with a famous fictional hero, Luydmila Pravoverova writes: "The action in *Peasant Family* is pushed back to the beginning of history, when people, animals, and birds existed in felicitous harmony. Is this not the very same golden age the clever *hidalgo* dreamed of?"¹³⁰ Probably, we can consider the *Peasant Family* to be the main representation of the *Universal Flowering*.

Another Filonov's painting that I would like to study in the present work is the already mentioned *Shrovetide* (fig.7). The motive of Shrovetide (or *Maslenitsa* in Russian) was very popular not only for the folk art but also among the recognized masters. For instance, Boris Kustodiev (1878-1927) – an honorary member of the Imperial Academy of Arts that Filonov had abandoned, two years later made his interpretation of the Shrovetide. Kustodiev's genre scene also has images of festive sleighs pulled by horses – one of the main attributes of the celebration. The sleigh from the work of Filonov even has a *Troika* – a sleigh with three horses abreast – one of the iconic Russian symbols. In the center of the painting, we can see a figure of a coachman, which resembles 'Joseph' from the *Peasant Family* with his emphasized peasant features. To the right, there are couples of city dwellers sitting in the sleigh, as we can judge from their appearance. In the upper left corner of the painting, there is one sleigh with a male figure in it that appears to be a coachman as well. Once more we can see Filonov's symbol of the *Universal Flowering* – roses. The general mood of the *Shrovetide* seem to be festive and merry, but let us study it in details.

The Troika was indeed a common subject to represent in traditional Russian art. In addition to *lubok* images, it was used quite often in the Fedoskino miniature –

¹²⁹ Derek Maus. "Space, Time and Things Made 'Strange': Andrei Belyi, Pavel Filonov and Theory of Forms". P. 91.

¹³⁰ Luydmila Pravoverova. "Pavel Filonov: Don Quixote of the Russian Avant-Garde" *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P. 52.

traditional lacquer miniature painting on papier-mache popular in the XIX century. The colorful oil painting was applied over a shimmering, usually black, background, creating an interesting effect of contrasting colors. The Fedoskino miniature could be seen anywhere as it was a common decoration for boxes, teapots, snuffboxes, etc. Of course having a craftsman education, Filonov could not fail to study the principles of Fedoskino art. Perhaps, that is why his early works have a similar combination of a dark background and brightly colored figures. This is particularly noticeable in the *Heads* (1910) and the *Feast of Kings* (1912-13).

We should recognize the importance of *lubok* images for Filonov as well. As mentions Natalia Apchinskaya, for Filonov icons and *lubok* images represented art that lives according to its own laws, embodying knowledge about things rather than their appearance.¹³¹ It corresponded Filonov's idea about the *Universal Flowering*, where he rejected the idea of only two predicates: the form and the color. In the *Shrovetide* we can see an apparent simplification of human figures, especially the ones of the lovers sitting in the sledge. They seem to be dolls with their artificially painted faces and similar poses. Male figures look austere while female ones look quite lost, there is a general feeling of alienation. Seem like they have gathered to celebrate the *Shrovetide* but they cannot break the feeling of unnaturalness. A *lubok* image *The Bell is ringing and Troika is rushing* (1881) also represents the theme of love. However, a song in the bottom part of it tells us a sad story of a coachman and a peasant girl. Peasant's feelings were true and passionate, while Filonov's couples seem to have no real interest in each other, they barely look at their lovers. Probably, Filonov once more stresses the difference between the peasant world and the urban one.

The central figure of the coachman, in contrast to the lovers, seem to look serene and quite confident; his bright blue eyes are almost staring at us. He somewhat resembles the Prophet Elijah with his fiery chariot, that was quite a popular theme for Russian iconography.¹³² Indeed, there is some spiritual force in this figure. J.E. Bowlt mentions that 'idols' from Filonov's paintings resemble Russian wooden sculptures and stone *babi*; we can see their massive hands and legs

¹³¹ Natalia Apchinskaya. "Pavel Filonov. Artist of the World Blooming and World Suffering."// *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P.26.

¹³² Galina Klokova, an Introduction to the *Russkaia ikonopis' = Russian icon painting = la peinture d'icônes Russes*. P. 31.

and roundish forms in many works, especially from the 1910's.¹³³ The same ones inspired Goncharova, as I have mentioned in the second chapter. Once more, we can see how pagan art together with the Orthodox icons influenced the Russian avant-garde artists.

Analyzing the representation of the movement on the *Shrovetide*, we can see that Filonov, despite the statements from his manifests, probably got under the influence of the already mentioned Russian Cubo-Futurism and the ideas of Shevchenko. As writes Natalia Apchinskaya: "The motive is used to demonstrate the endless cycle of Being through a combination of motion and motionless. Like the masters of archaic art and his Futurist contemporaries, Filonov portrays this motion by repeating the silhouettes of the immobile figures".¹³⁴ Perhaps, for Filonov it was not just depicting intermediate forms; as he mentions in his "Declaration of the Universal Flowering", it was a scientific, analytical, intuitive naturalism, an initiative of an investigator of all the predicates of an object, of the whole world's phenomena.¹³⁵

Comparing with the artists studied in the first chapters of the present work, Pavel Filonov's paintings are more intellectual and complex. As mentions Derek Maus: "[...] the fragmented, geometrically abstract composition separates this painting from the mainstream of neo-Primitivist painting".¹³⁶ The cycle of the *Universal Flowering*, which includes the *Peasant Family* and the *Shrovetide*, showed that Filonov's created works of a great talent that combined abstract painting, Primitivism, Symbolism and even Cubo-Futurism.

The mentioned paintings of Pavel Filonov are only a minor part of his artistic legacy. Incredibly, but almost all of his works are in Russia and it is Pavel Filonov's merit. In his diaries, he wrote that for years he had declined offers of selling his works in order to give them to the government and create a special museum (or at least a department at the State Russian Museum).¹³⁷ Unfortunately, it has not

¹³³ J.E. Bowl. "Pavel Filonov and Russian Modernism"// *Pavel Filonov: A hero and his fate*; abridged version published in Russian as "Pavel Filonov i Russkiy Modernizm". P. 9.

¹³⁴ Natalia Apchinskaya. "Pavel Filonov. Artist of the World Blooming and World Suffering."// *Pavel Filonov: 125th anniversary of the artist's birth (1883-1935)*. P.30.

¹³⁵ Deklaracia Mirovogo Rascveta (Declaration of Universal Flowering)// Filonov: hudoznik, issledovatel', uchitel' (Filonov: a painter, an investigator, a teacher). P. 88.

¹³⁶ Derek Maus. "Space, Time and Things Made 'Strange': Andrei Belyi, Pavel Filonov and Theory of Forms". P.93.

¹³⁷ Pavel Filonov. *Dnevnik* (Diaries). P.453.

happened yet, but with time an interest to Filonov's works increases and maybe one day his wish will be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the art of the first quarter of the XX century, we can see that the interest for the Primitive art was indeed international. Russian avant-garde has its specificity, though: mixing many different styles that came from the West, primitivist aesthetics were a constant element for Russian artists.¹³⁸

Artists, whose works I have studied in the present work, were only a small part of a big group of enthusiasts, who was rediscovering the folk art of their own country. The importance of their discoveries can be proved by the words of J.E.Bowl: "The neoprimitivists, in fact, found in naïve art a complex of devices that had little in common with the basic aesthetic of Western idealist painting, and these they emphasized often to the detriment of mimetic value. Their disproportionate concentration on such specific artistic concepts as inverted perspective, flat rendition of figures, distinct vulgarization of form, outline by color rather than by line, and consequently, the shift in visual priorities began a process of reduction that one is tempted to relate ultimately to Malevich's *White on White* (1918)".¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Jean-Claude Marcadé, "The Russian Cézanneists/Fauvists/ Neo-Primitives of the Knave of Diamonds (1910s) and Western European Fauvists and Expressionists"// *The Knave of Diamonds in the Russian avant-garde*. P.24.

¹³⁹ J.E. Bowl. Introduction// *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism*. P.27.

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APPENDIX



1. Ilya Mashkov

*Self-Portrait and Portrait of Pyotr
Konchalovsky, 1910*

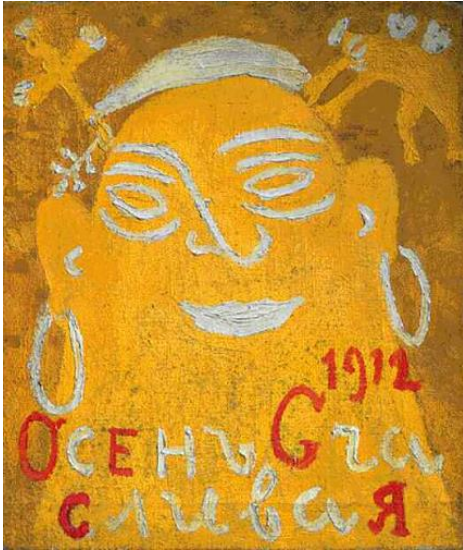
Oil on canvas. 208 x 270 cm



2. Ilya Mashkov

Still life with a pineapple. 1908.

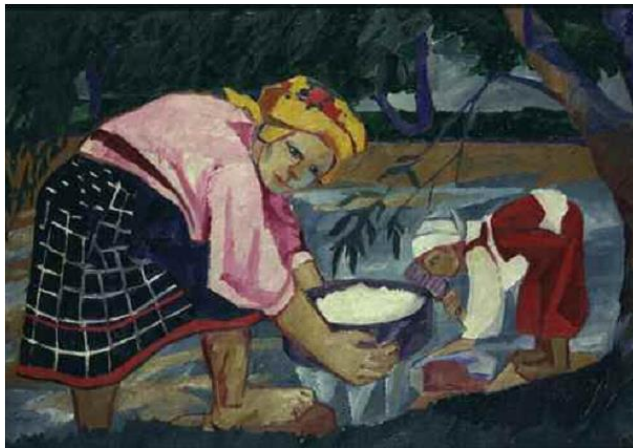
Oil on canvas. 121 x 171 cm



3. Mikhail Larionov

Autumn Yellow (Happy). 1912.

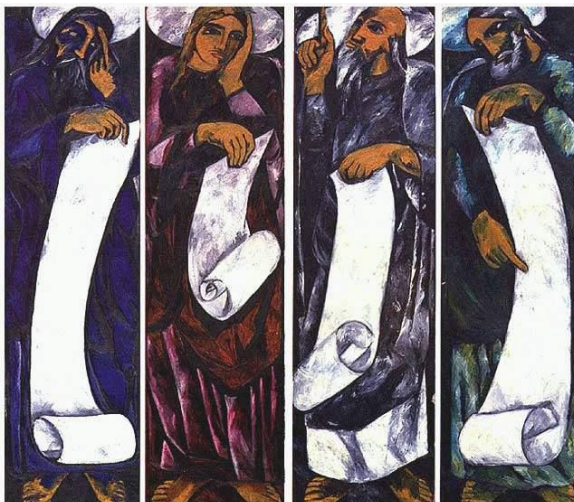
Oil on canvass. 53,5 x 44,5 cm



4. Natalia Goncharova

Peasant Women, 1910

Oil on canvas 73 x 103 cm



5. Natalia Goncharova

Evangelists. Polyptich. 1911

Oil on canvas. 204 x 58 cm (each)



6. Pavel Filonov

A peasant Family (The Holy Family). 1914

Oil on canvas. 99 x 79 cm



7. Pavel Filonov

Shrovetide. 1913-1914

Oil on canvas. 99 x 79 cm